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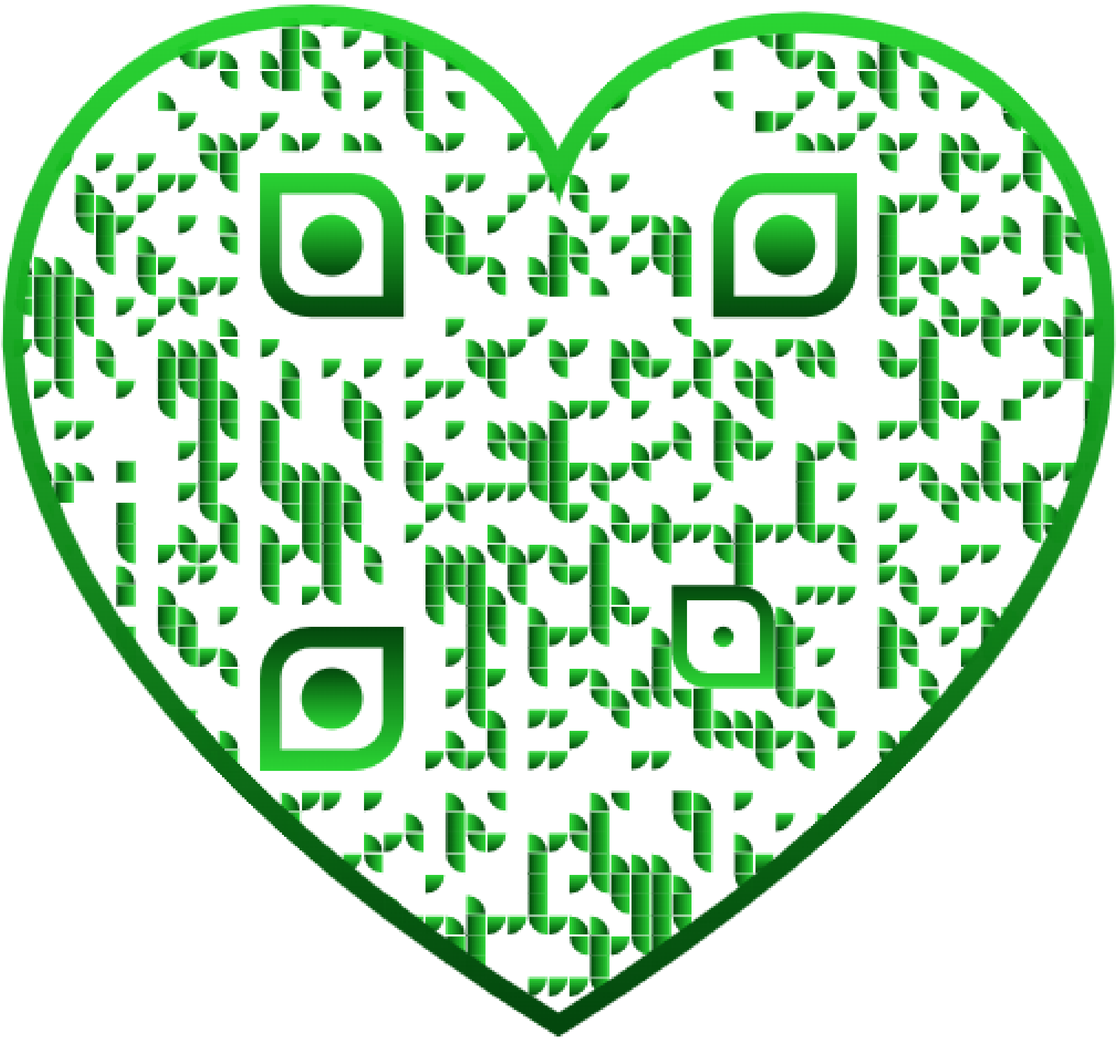

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COMMENT

THE NEW FREELANDER WILL NEED TO WALK A FINE LINE

Our exclusive scoop on the Freelander's return (p4) highlights an example of a recent trend: car makers betting that the reinvention of an iconic nameplate will appeal to today's buyers.

The revival of the Freelander seems a safe bet in so many ways. But there's a curveball. This model will be engineered and made in China by Chery as part of its joint venture with JLR and exported to other markets, including the UK. Chery already builds JLR models but not for the UK, so this is the first.

The reason, of course, is cost. Producing this car in China means significantly lower costs for what is intended to be a relatively affordable model. It's an opportunity to add an entry-level car to the JLR stable – one designed by its renowned design chief Gerry McGovern – but with the cost efficiencies of China's cheaper economy.

Yet a core appeal of JLR models over the years has been the British flavour of their engineering and this is clearly not something that the new Freelander can dine out on.

JLR has faced many challenges in recent years, but pulling off a successfully executed modern-day Freelander, developed and built in China – one that complements its model line-up, creates brand appeal and delivers good financial results – would be its biggest coup yet.

Rachel Burgess, magazine editor
rachel.burgess@haymarket.com

Meanwhile, online...

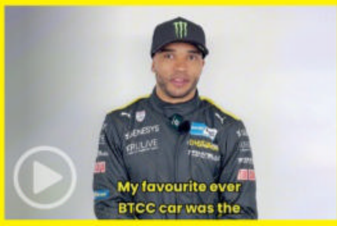
autocar.co.uk

McLaren and Porsche take on Ducati

See what happened when we pitted a McLaren P1 and a Porsche 918 Spyder against a Ducati 1199.

Crazy cars from sensible manufacturers

Did someone spike the decision makers' coffee? Who knows why, but these oddities got the okay.



BTCC drivers' fave cars

Which cars do hardcore racers lust after? Today's grid of BTCC drivers give some surprising and downright strange answers.

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"Two colossal containers of Lego were rattling away like Bez at a Happy Mondays gig" p58

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NEWS

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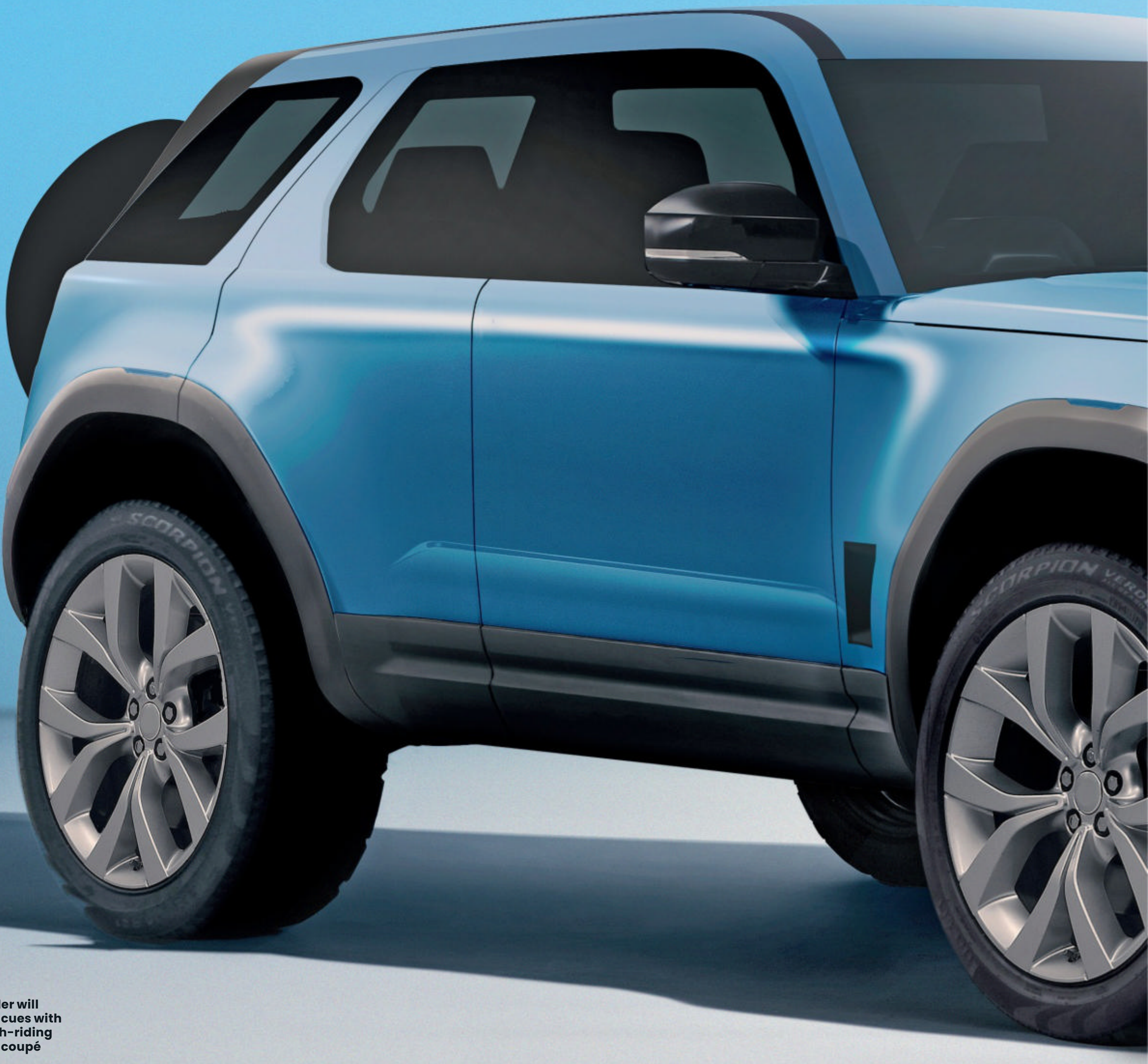
will.rimell@haymarket.com

FREELANDER TO RETURN AS JLR-CHERY BRAND

A Chinese-built family of models will be designed by JLR and engineered by Chery



First Freelander will fuse off-road cues with those of a high-riding performance coupé

The reborn Freelander brand, which revives the famous nameplate for a new family of Chinese-made models, will arrive in the UK before the end of the decade – and the first will be a chunky but rakish crossover designed by JLR chief creative officer Gerry McGovern.

The new brand is the result of a tie-up between JLR and its long-term manufacturing partner in China, Chery, which will engineer the cars using its own electrified platforms. Announcing the Freelander's return in June last year, JLR said the Chery collaboration creates "mutually beneficial prospects for the future".

The debut crossover model is slated for a launch in late 2026 or early 2027, appearing first in China before global exports begin. It will be sold initially with a plug-in hybrid powertrain but EV and range-extender (REx) versions will follow.

Although it will be built by Chery in Changshu – where the car maker already produces local-market Range Rover Evoques and Discovery Sports – the styling of the cars will be overseen by McGovern, the man behind the original Freelander designs.

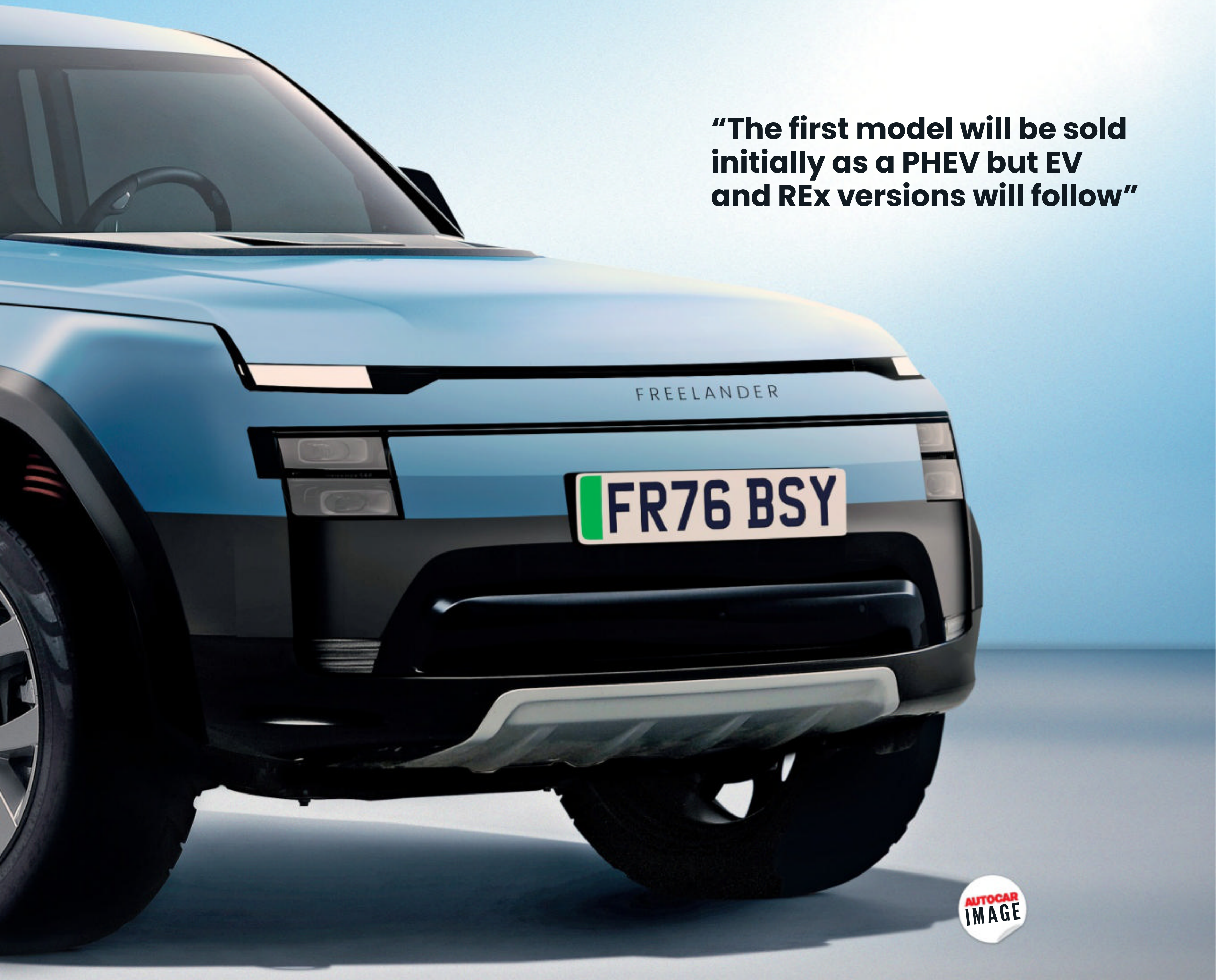
Autocar understands the first model will blend the rakishness of high-riding performance coupés like the Porsche Macan with chunky off-road design cues. It is believed that the intention is to make the car stand out in an ever more crowded SUV market by using the aesthetic of an off-roader on a more streamlined shape.

By giving the car a younger, more confident silhouette, Chery can better differentiate the Freelander from JLR's own incoming Defender Sport model, which will shrink the blocky shape of the bigger car for a wider audience when it arrives around 2027.

The Freelander will be underpinned by Chery's T1X platform, which is used by a range of Chery brands, including recent UK arrivals Omoda and Jaecoo.

The platform has a variable wheelbase so can accommodate a range of cars from larger SUVs, such as the Range Rover Velar-sized Chery Tiggo 9L, to crossovers, like the Nissan Qashqai-sized Omoda 3. ▸

"The first model will be sold initially as a PHEV but EV and REx versions will follow"



JLR has yet to indicate which types of models will make up the new Freelander family. However, it has previously said the new Freelanders will be seen as "independent from both Chery's existing portfolio and JLR's modern luxury House of Brands", which is made up of Defender, Discovery, Jaguar and Range Rover.

But it is known that the first Freelander will arrive initially as a plug-in hybrid. Chery offers a range of PHEV power outputs and the Freelander is likely to package the high-power system from the new Omoda 9 mid-size SUV.

That model's Super Hybrid System uses a 143bhp 1.5-litre turbo petrol and three electric motors to give a claimed combined output of 443bhp. That's good for a 0-62mph sprint in just 4.9sec, something the all-wheel-drive Freelander is likely to improve on as Chery upgrades its combustion engines and electric motors.

A similar set-up used by the new Tiggo 9L gives the car the ability to do Mercedes G-Class-style tank turns.

Chery's knowledge of JLR systems and its experience with its off-road-angled Jetour and iCar brands mean the Freelander is likely to have all the off-road ability you would expect of a car with a name associated with Land Rover, even if that badge will be absent.

Electric power will also feature heavily thanks to the set-up's 34kWh battery. In the Omoda 9, this gives a claimed electric range of 93 miles, something the Freelander could even exceed, given its more slippery shape.

After the plug-in hybrid, REx and fully electric powertrains will arrive.

REXs are the latest spin on hybrid cars, whereby a combustion engine acts as a generator to power the electric motor or top up the battery, rather than driving the wheels.

The powertrain's popularity is surging (sales doubling year on year) in China – one of JLR's biggest markets that it is trying to rebuild after a tough 2024. As such, Chery's REx technology is likely to have been particularly attractive to JLR when the deal was brokered.

European manufacturers such as Volkswagen have

WHY THE ORIGINAL FREELANDER WAS A HIT

When Land Rover first revealed the Freelander in 1997, it cost £18,000 – the price of a Dacia Duster today. Where it won us over was in its chic looks, clever packaging and genuine off-road ability. "Land Rover has got its sums spot on with the Freelander; it's a class act," we said.

READ THE ROAD TEST

"JLR said the Freelander will be sold via dedicated Chery-run dealers"

Previously, Freelander was a rugged SUV from 1997 to 2016

also confirmed plans to launch their own REx models in Europe.

As for the first pure-electric Freelander, its tech make-up remains a mystery. Currently, Chery sells only two EVs and its newer model is the Omoda E5, which is sold in the UK. A platform-mate to the Freelander, it draws power from a 61kWh Blade battery, offers a WLTP range of 257 miles and uses a single 204bhp motor.

However, when the Freelander EV finally arrives later this decade, more advanced technology is expected to be available, giving it more range and more power. That will be needed, because the Freelander is expected to be priced at almost double the E5's £25,000.

Freelander will be built on the T1X platform, as used by the Jaecoo 7

The high-volume nature of the platform means the cost of producing the Freelander at the Chery-JLR plant in Changshu near Shanghai will be relatively low. But with the model pitched at a higher price point than equivalent Omoda and Jaecoo SUVs when it arrives in the UK, it should offer good profit margins for JLR and Chery.

While a start date for UK sales has yet to be confirmed, JLR said last year that sales will be initially concentrated on China, with exports to other markets starting over time. However, Chery's recent push to boost its own exports, including launching the all-new global Lepas, Jetour and iCar/iCaur brands, could persuade the company to move faster in getting the new Freelander into the European Union and UK markets.

The revival will strike a chord with UK buyers in particular, who have fond memories of the compact SUV that ran from 1997 until 2016, when it was replaced by the Discovery Sport.

The rapid development of technology over the past 10 years means that previous Freelander owners will struggle to reconcile the digital features in the cabin with those of their old car. However, anyone worried that Chery will be tempted to bundle all cabin controls on to the screen – something brands such as Omoda and Jaecoo have been criticised for – will be comforted by Chery's pivot towards chunky, tactile dials to operate features like the heating, volume and drive mode in the iCar range.

A large screen will still feature, though, either positioned landscape with a function to slide it across to the passenger (as in the Omoda 7) or portrait.

JLR has said the Freelander models will be sold via a network of its own dedicated Chery-run dealerships. Freelander won't feature under the company's luxury-focused 'House of Brands' marketing and sales strategy.

DAVID FRANCIS

DID JLR AND CHERY SEE OUR IDEA IN 2020?

AUTOCAR IMAGE

The idea to bring back the Freelander name as a stand-alone brand has actually been pitched before – by your favourite car magazine.

Back in 2020, the Autocar team got together to see how difficult it could be to come up with a desirable new car brand.

The brief: a not-at-all-hypothetical car-mad billionaire fancies setting up his own car firm – and they've asked us to find the right brand.

So we hatched a plan to identify a gap in the market to find a plausible, profitable and all-new car company that would be based in the UK but capable of big-scale earnings from exports.

The answer: Freelander EV Ltd.

Why? The name (at the time) was dormant but already exerted a great deal of appeal for the compact, youth-oriented products that our brand would want to build, and that type of vehicle – an electric compact SUV – showed (back in 2020) every likelihood of being the highest-demand vehicles of both the near and distant future.

Our plan was to initially keep the start-up as a satellite of Land Rover (as Volvo supports Polestar) so that it can make selective use of JLR's talents, resources and suppliers. For example, we planned for it to use the Jaguar I-Pace's platform.

What's most interesting is the parity with what is happening today with Chery and JLR: while the new Freelander brand will be built in a cost-effective way by Chery, it will be JLR that designs it. Spookily, we also pitched it as a rakish crossover built primarily to grow JLR in China.

Scan the QR code to read the feature

SPY SHOTS

PORSCHE RAMPS UP 718 CAYMAN EV TESTING

New electric coupé is due next year, six months after Boxster EV drop-top

Porsche is stepping up testing of its 718 Cayman EV as it readies its first electric sports cars for next year.

Autocar understands the German car maker will pull the covers off the 718 Boxster EV roadster first, with the Cayman coupé due to be shown, as with previous model generations, six months after that.

It's expected that the first debut will come in early 2026, given that Boxster mules have been frequently seen testing during the past few months – and we have now finally spotted a Cayman prototype being rigorously put through its paces on track.

These photos from the Nürburgring Nordschleife provide our clearest look yet at the new two-seat EV and show just how close it will be to its existing ICE sibling in size and styling.

A few key changes are evident, though, such as new lights and a more angular bonnet – both influenced by the Taycan electric saloon in a probable push for optimal slipperiness.

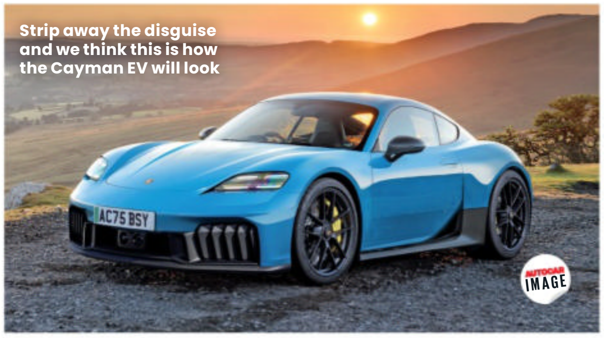
There are also wider air intakes to provide extra cooling for the brakes and what is likely to be a dual-motor powertrain.

The Cayman and Boxster EVs use a new bespoke electric sports car platform to ensure they offer a "real sports car feeling", Porsche R&D chief Michael Steiner has previously told Autocar.

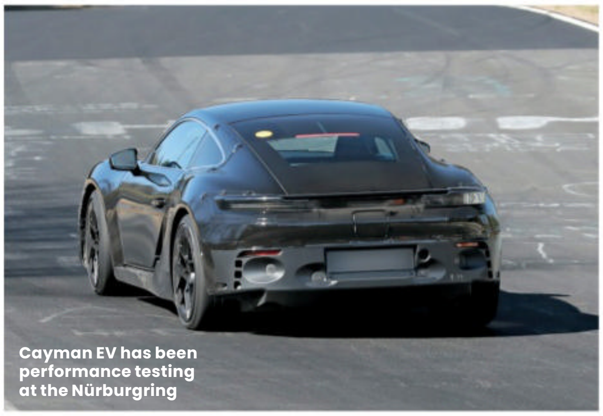
In pursuit of a light and nimble driving experience, the battery pack will be sited behind the driver – similar to a mid-engined ICE car set-up – rather than under the floor. The aim is to optimise balance and to make the driving position as low as possible.

No official figures have been given, but the motors are expected to come from the larger Taycan, whose outputs start at 402bhp and top out at 1019bhp.

WILL RIMELL



Strip away the disguise and we think this is how the Cayman EV will look



Cayman EV has been performance testing at the Nürburgring

Behind its two seats is a stacked battery pack, to give a mid-engined feel

US SLASHES IMPORT TARIFF TO 10% FOR FIRST 100K UK CARS

TARIFFS ON THE first 100,000 UK-built cars imported to the US will be reduced from 25% to 10% as part of a major new trade deal between the two countries.

The deal follows more than a month of negotiations between UK and US officials after US president Donald Trump announced sweeping import tariffs on foreign-made products.

All tariffs were due to start on 1 April but a 90-day reprieve was given to allow negotiations to take place.

Details of the new deal are sparse but the US said the 10% tariff – which brings cars in line with the levy on other foreign goods – will apply to "100,000 cars". The suggestion is that anything over this number will be hit by the 25% rate. Before Trump's announcement in March, the tariff was 2.5%.

UK prime minister Keir Starmer said: "We have scope now to increase that quota. This is not final." He added that the 10% rate represented "a huge and important reduction".

Last year, the UK sent 102,000 cars to the US, which is the British car industry's second-largest export market, behind the EU. The US received 27% of all UK-made vehicles in 2024.

No details were given on the proposed 25% tariff on car parts due to begin in the coming months. New deals on food, chemicals, machinery and industry have been struck, although details have yet to be fully confirmed.

The UK is the first nation to reach an agreement with the US following Trump's tariff announcement in March. On the UK deal, Trump said: "I'm thrilled to announce a breakthrough trade deal – the agreement with one of our closest and most cherished allies. Final details are being written up and will be detailed in the coming weeks."

Starmer said: "This is a really fantastic, historic day – a real tribute to the history we have of working together. This [deal] is going to boost trade."

In response to the news, Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders boss Mike Hawes said: "The agreement is great news for the industry and consumers. The application of these tariffs was a severe and immediate threat to UK automotive exporters, so this deal will provide much needed relief."

The deal represents a big step down from Trump's March announcement. At the time, he said the decision was made because of the imbalance of American-made car sales in other markets.

Around eight million cars were imported into the US last year, roughly half the total sold in the market.

The news will bring relief to the UK's car makers, especially JLR, which counts the US as its biggest market. CEO Adrian Mardell said: "We warmly welcome this deal, which brings greater certainty for our sector."

Tariff talks between the EU and US remain ongoing.

> **"We warmly welcome this deal, which brings greater certainty for our sector"**

UK AND INDIA REACH DEAL ON TARIFFS TOO

With Range Rover, JLR has one of India's top-selling luxury car brands

India will slash its tariff on "high-end" UK-built cars from more than 100% to 10% as part of a landmark trade deal between the two nations.

While the definition of "high-end" has yet to confirmed, the suggestions are that the benchmark would be set at ₹4 million, equivalent to around £35,000.

The key winner in the deal is expected to be JLR, owned by India's Tata Group, because it is one of the best-selling luxury brands in India.

It currently assembles the Range Rover Evoque, Range Rover Velar and Land Rover Discovery Sport from knock-down kits in Pune and last year said it would add the highly profitable Range Rover and Range Rover Sport – both currently built in Solihull. The new trade deal is likely to give JLR additional capacity to increase the supply of those models should the factory be outstripped by demand.

Other beneficiaries are likely to include Aston Martin, Bentley and Rolls-Royce.

The UK government has confirmed it will impose a similar limit on import of Indian-built cars in the UK, such as the forthcoming Suzuki eVitara and its Toyota Urban Cruiser sibling.

Starmer and JLR boss Mardell (centre) both welcome the new deal

27% of all UK-made cars in 2024, worth £9 billion, were exported to the US

GETTY IMAGES

WAITING TIMES FOR SPARE PARTS GROWING LONGER

More complex cars and financial pressures on manufacturers blamed

Drivers are facing increasing delays in getting their cars repaired as cash-strapped manufacturers struggle to maintain a healthy stock of spare parts for an increasingly complex car parc.

Readers have alerted Autocar to the issue in recent months, sharing their experiences of long waits.

One reader had a Range Rover Sport P400e with a JLR dealer for seven weeks before its drive battery fault was diagnosed and a part wait time of more than a year was relayed. Another's Hyundai Ioniq 5 had been off the road for 10 weeks awaiting a part that was still "two to three more weeks" away.

Their experiences tally with the findings of the latest Reliability Survey by Autocar sibling title What Car?. Of the nearly 10,000 respondents who had a problem with their car last year, more than one in 10 were made to wait more than a week for repairs.

The issue also has significant ramifications for businesses. According to a new report by leasing firm Arval, almost a quarter of UK fleets recorded an increase in vehicle downtime over the past year.

The main reason for that, according to Ben Townsend, head of automotive at risk analyst Thatcham Research, is the increasing complexity of new cars, which require more parts.

He explained: "Look at a windscreen replacement as a simple example. If you go back 15 years, windscreen replacement was [swapping] a piece of glass that could be done in your driveway. Now it's a piece of glass that's potentially got a camera behind it, that's potentially got radar or lidar attached to it, that's potentially got a heated windscreen matrix. All of that adds to the complexity.

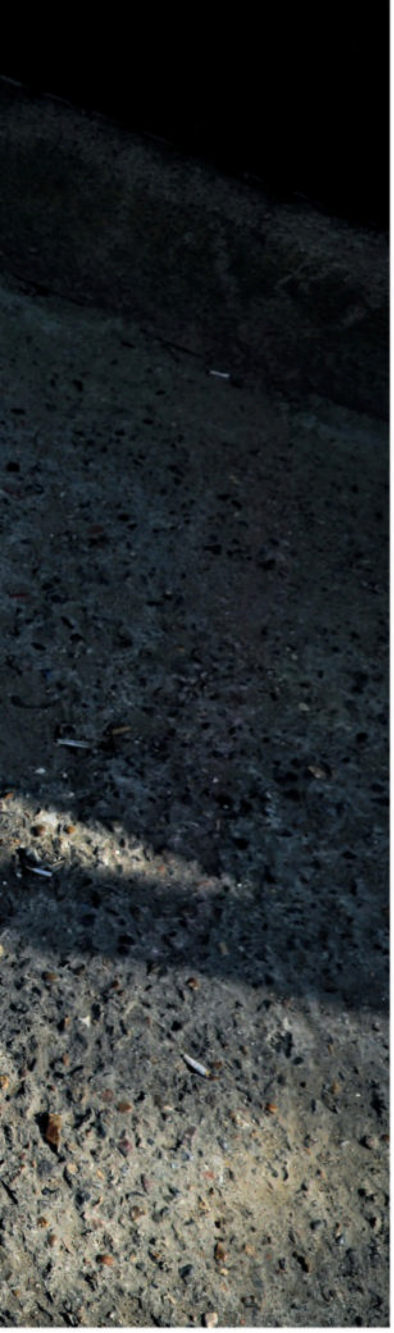
ALL HAIL THE ROBO-JAGS

Waymo, Google's autonomous vehicle company, is preparing to convert another 2000 Jaguar I-Paces into robotaxis at a new US facility in Arizona. This is the "final delivery" after JLR retired the EV.

FERRARI EV A STEP CLOSER

The first details of Ferrari's debut electric car will be revealed on 9 October, ahead of a full reveal next spring. CEO Benedetto Vigna confirmed that the EV's "technological heart" will be outlined first.

SPY SHOT



“It also requires specialist tooling and calibration that requires more specialist tooling. So what has been a circa-£300 job on your driveway becomes a circa-£1500 job at a specialist centre that may take two days. That requires a courtesy car.

“You can see, just for a windscreen replacement, the complexity goes up, and the number of parts required and the skill that’s required, all of that. Do that for headlights, do that for radars and the amount of parts that logistics companies have to carry goes up massively.”

On top of this, suggested Townsend, car makers are no longer stocking a large surplus of spare parts, due to various factors affecting their finances.

“The biggest pain point for the incumbent vehicle manufacturers is cash flow,” he said. “Because of the challenges coming from the likes of China and with [import] tariffs in America, Dieselgate, electrification and all of this, they simply don’t have the cash flow to have millions of pounds sitting in stock.

“They’re having to reduce their stock holdings across Europe that would traditionally have supplied the market, because they simply can’t afford to have millions of pounds sitting in a warehouse not doing anything.”

> **“Car makers can simply no longer afford to have millions of pounds sitting in a warehouse not doing anything”**

This point is particularly pertinent at a time when the market is demanding broader choice, explained Townsend, because with each type of powertrain comes a different assortment of parts, dramatically increasing the cost of keeping a healthy supply of spares.

He said: “If we were all buying electric vehicles, the problem would go away, because they would just move from one [powertrain type] to another. But the market isn’t quite ready, so manufacturers have to serve the market by producing plug-in hybrids, normal hybrids, electric variants etc. So it’s hugely complex at a time when manufacturers are cash-constrained.”

The wait times also put pressure on insurers to declare crashed cars a total loss when they have suffered only minor damage, explained Townsend. This is because the cost of a courtesy car may outweigh the value of a repair if the part will take weeks or months to arrive.

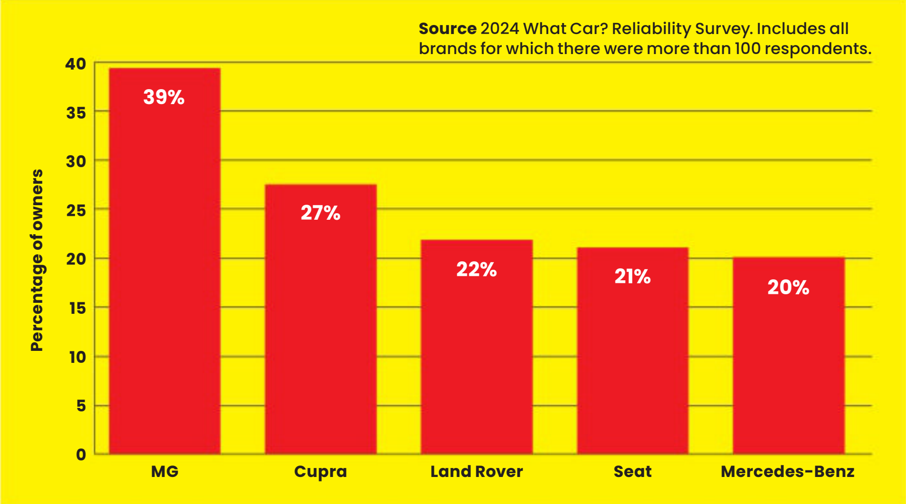
He said: “We had an incident with an EV in the middle of 2023. Somebody bought an EV brand new in July for £35,000. Then it suffered a third-party hit. The door and the wing mirror were damaged. The vehicle manufacturer couldn’t provide a lead time [for a replacement mirror], so that car was written off for a wing mirror.”

In a similar example, Townsend revealed that when Thatcham crash-tested an Ioniq 5 at less than 10mph (representative of most incidents for which an insurance claim is made), it incurred repairable damage to its front bumper and front wing, and while its radar was unblemished, the radar’s bracket had snapped, and a replacement had a lead time of seven months.

“If you then look from an insurance point of view, seven months of an electric hire car would have written that car off,” said Townsend.

CHARLIE MARTIN

WHOSE CARS WAITED MORE THAN A WEEK TO BE FIXED IN 2024?



Source 2024 What Car? Reliability Survey. Includes all brands for which there were more than 100 respondents.

CULTURE CLASH SCUTTLING CHINESE CARS

Chinese manufacturers have caught flak for long lead times and high repair costs. But according to Thatcham’s Ben Townsend, the issue isn’t necessarily with the cars or manufacturers themselves; instead it’s down to a differing philosophy. Due to China’s significantly cheaper labour rates, the country’s standard approach to repairs is to replace entire sections of a car, rather than individual panels.

“They will spend £3000 on the parts and then £300 on labour, because it’s cheap to do,” said Townsend. “You would never do that in Europe. For a rear-end repair, you would replace the back panel or the rear quarter, but the parts that Chinese manufacturers are supplying are a whole boot floor or a whole side of a vehicle.”

This means the spare parts supplied in Europe are often overkill for the repair work needed, creating wastage both in time and in materials.

DEFENDER PREPS FOR DAKAR

JLR has started testing its Land Rover Defender-based Dakar Rally car ahead of its debut next year. The desert raider uses the same chassis, transmission and 4.4-litre V8 as the new range-topping Octa.

ROCKET LIT UNDER MK1 MX-5

Hampshire-based Mazda MX-5 specialist Rocketeer Cars is turning the Mk1 roadster into a supercar slayer with a 3.0-litre V6. It will launch the restomod, called the Keiryo (Japanese for ‘lightweight’), this summer.

GETTY IMAGES

VOLVO RESURRECTS XC70 AS LONG-RANGE PHEV

It will have a 124-mile EV range and could be sold in the UK

Volvo is reviving the XC70 name for a new long-range plug-in hybrid SUV that could make its way to the UK following initial sales in China.

The company's first "extended-range plug-in hybrid" has been previewed ahead of a reveal in the coming months and a launch later this year.

Volvo says the new XC70 is designed specifically "to meet the demand for longer-range plug-in hybrids in China" and it will explore "potential additional markets at a later stage".

Technical details remain scarce, but Volvo has promised a pure-electric range of up to 124 miles, which is more than double what the Volvo XC60 PHEV can achieve.

The XC70 is described as slightly larger than the XC60 and looks like a downscaled XC90, but it is based on a new architecture designed specifically for long-range hybrids.

The Scalable Modular Architecture, or SMA, is said to be "a premium extended-range plug-in hybrid architecture" but no details of its relationship to Volvo's other platforms – or indeed those from the wider Geely group, of which Volvo is a part – have been given.

Geely-owned sibling Lotus is also investing in extended-range hybrids over the coming years in response to lower-than-anticipated demand for pure-electric luxury cars, and Coventry-based LEVC (also owned by Geely) has been using a range-extender (REx) powertrain in its Volvo-engined TX taxi since 2017.

However, while those two firms are using combustion engines as a generator to top up a traction battery, Volvo's new XC70 is a more conventional plug-in hybrid.

Nonetheless, the XC70 will help the firm cater to huge demand for extended-range hybrids in China.

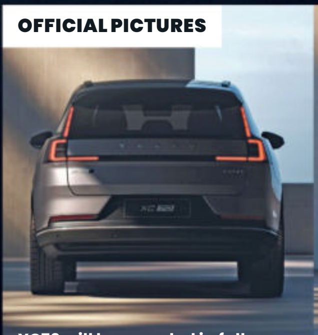
Volvo CEO Håkan Samuelsson said long-range hybrid tech provides "a perfect bridge to full electrification" amid a slowing of demand for pure-EVs.

"It enables us to maintain and develop a balanced product portfolio while offering a highly attractive alternative to customers who are not yet ready for fully electric cars," he said. "This is also an example of regionalisation, where we adapt to the local market needs."

Other manufacturers are pursuing the same goal. Volkswagen, for example, unveiled the new China-oriented ID Era REx concept at the Shanghai motor show and said it would look to bring the technology to the US and Europe.

"They will be of relevance" in creating a bridge for ICE buyers to transition to EVs, said VW marketing boss Martin Sander.

FELIX PAGE



OFFICIAL PICTURES

XC70 will be revealed in full soon

Familiar Volvo design cues are underpinned by a new SMA platform

NEW MERCEDES CLA DROPS CHARGING CLANGER

CLA will reach the UK this summer but can't use 400V chargers

THE INCOMING ELECTRIC Mercedes-Benz CLA is unable to use any 400V DC charger – a common standard across the UK and mainland Europe.

Priced from £45,615, the EV lacks a DC-to-DC voltage booster, which means it can only fast-charge at stations that supply 800V – typically found on newer HPC (high-power charging) networks. As a result, it is also incompatible with many older 50kW units and most Tesla Superchargers.

The majority of the UK's 14,448 public fast-charging (50kW-plus) points are understood to be 400V systems. The main difference between the two is the charging speed range: 400V is 50-250kW, while 800V is 150kW-plus.

Mercedes has confirmed the charging limitation on its German website: "Charging at 400V charging stations is not possible and for this reason they are not shown in the navigation system."

Backing its decision, a spokesperson told Autocar: "The share of 800V DC fast-charging stations is constantly increasing."

Asked if there would be a paid option to fit a DC converter, they said: "We cannot comment on this now."

OFFICIAL PICTURES

ŠKODA
New Enyaq RS

ENYAQ vRS GETS FRESH LOOK, MORE RANGE, NEW MOTORS

THE SKODA ENYAQ vRS has been updated, gaining a new face and more range.

Visual changes follow the standard car's update in January with a reworked front bumper, a more prominent chin, a choice of 20in or 21in alloy wheels and the option of exclusive Hyper Green paintwork.

Inside, sports seats are fitted and a 13in infotainment touchscreen continues to dominate the dashboard.

The vRS's battery capacity has also grown by 2kWh to 79kWh (usable capacity). Alongside improvements to the Enyaq's aerodynamic performance, this boosts its claimed range from 321 miles to 340 miles.

The electric SUV retains its dual-motor, four-wheel-drive set-up but it now uses the uprated motors deployed in the smaller Elroq vRS. These combine to put out 335bhp and offer a 0-62mph time of 5.4sec.

Prices for the Enyaq vRS SUV start at £51,660, while the Coupé version kicks off at £53,560.

Sporty theme continues inside with piped sports seats; main screen is 13in

BMW CONFIRMS A NEW X7 IS ON THE WAY

BMW is developing a second-generation X7. The news was confirmed in the BMW Group's latest financial results, where it noted development costs on successors to the X5 and X7. Autocar understands the new X7 will use an upgraded version of the current car's CLAR platform so an iX7 variant is also likely. The new X7 is tipped to arrive in 2027.

Next big thing

JESSE CROSSE

Continental, like rivals, is steadily making ADAS more sophisticated

SELF-DRIVING CARS MOVE CLOSER, THANKS TO CHINA

AUTONOMOUS DRIVING AND the technology behind it played a significant part at the recent Shanghai motor show. For over a decade, the industry has believed that there won't be a sudden leap from conventional cars to fully automated self-driving cars. Instead, it has expected ADAS features to gradually increase in sophistication until they become capable of taking over control of the car.

Currently, the focus for car makers and suppliers is the transition from level two to level three, as laid down by the SAE's six levels of driving automation. Up to level two (like the latest adaptive cruise control with steering input and lane-keeping), the driver is always 'driving' when assistance features are engaged. But at level three, the car is doing the driving unless it asks the driver to take back control.

In reality, the lines are blurred and the industry is talking about level two-plus and level two-plus-plus, which are creeping rather than leaping to level three.

According to Volkswagen, which showed its latest AI-powered ADAS features in Shanghai, level two-plus is expected to be in over 80% of Chinese vehicles by 2030 and level two-plus-plus, which handles urban as well as highway driving, in 75% of new vehicles. Volkswagen is bringing level two-plus to the road this year and level two-plus-plus with Urban Navigate on Autopilot (NoA) will be launched next year.

ZF has developed several 'transitional' level-two features as well. For example, its level-two-plus coDrive has 360deg camera perception to enable hands- and feet-free driving as well as automated lane-changing. It has already lined up a product called coPilot, which covers level two-plus to level four and includes automated overtaking, all-round sensing of the environment, garage parking and route learning.

Continental showed two solutions, called Luna and Astra. Luna is an entry-level system with ADAS features and parking functions. Astra supports more advanced level two-plus-plus driving functions and can cope with a wide range of scenarios. It also has NoA, which, says Continental, can cope with China's complex urban road environment and covers narrow road detour avoidance and left and right turns where there are no traffic lights. It can also deal with on/off ramps.

Behind the tech are its intelligent driving sensors, including sixth-generation radar and cameras. It has a single-radar autonomous emergency braking solution that meets China's standards and it's introducing an AI-powered night-vision camera.

Given the popularity of autonomous driving in China, the scale of the market should help speed its development. China sold more new cars in March this year (1.97 million) than the UK did in all of 2024.

Continental launched Luna and Astra ADAS at Shanghai

HOW THE UK IS GEARING UP TO BE AN EV BATTERY CENTRE

Recycling and refining advances will give UK plants vital raw materials

Battery makers stand to benefit from sourcing more material locally

The UK's ambition to become a major centre of EV battery manufacture is one step closer as work begins on its first integrated lithium ion battery recycling and refining facility capable of producing the key ingredients of battery cells on an industrial scale.

The new plant in Plymouth is the penultimate stage in British company Altilium's four-part plan, which will culminate in the creation of a refinery on Teesside. When it goes live at the end of 2027, this is slated to produce high-quality, recycled cathode active material (CAM) for UK gigafactories.

Until then, the Plymouth plant will produce recycled nickel mixed hydroxide precipitate (MHP) and lithium sulphate – critical intermediate materials for domestic production of battery cathodes used by a range of industries.

Creating the CAM used in EV batteries requires expensive refining. Efforts in this direction have been boosted by rules governing new EV batteries sold in the EU that state they will need to have minimum levels of recycled lithium, nickel and cobalt from 2031, with further increases in 2036.

Altilium has developed a process for extracting and processing these metals to the required quality and earlier this year announced it had produced, at the UK Battery Industrialisation Centre, the UK's first EV battery cells using recycled CAM and complying with those regulations.

20%
The predicted reduction in cost of recycled CAM versus virgin material

DOMESTIC BATTERY RECYCLING 'VITAL'

The news comes in the wake of a report by the government on battery recycling in the UK. It says a secure supply of critical minerals – such as lithium and cobalt – is vital for economic growth and security. However, the country is currently reliant on the international market, especially China, to supply most of these minerals.

One solution, it says, lies in the recycling of lithium ion batteries from the growing volume of end-of-life EVs, which, it claims, "could supply between 39% and 57% of the demand for lithium, cobalt and nickel by 2040".

However, the cost of such work can be prohibitive. Altilium says its approach underlines the sector's finely balanced economics. "We're always looking to optimise our processes to make them cost-effective," said Altilium spokesperson Dominic Schreiber. "We're scaling progressively and, crucially, validating everything to ensure we de-risk the business at every stage. Until our Teesside plant comes on stream, our intermediate material will be a necessary income generator."

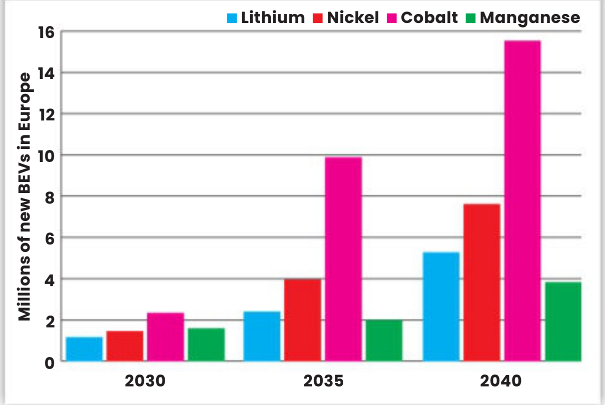
When that day dawns, Altilium's customers for its Teesside product are likely to include Nissan's current and forthcoming gigafactories in Sunderland and JLR owner Tata's site in Somerset.

"For car and battery makers keen to reduce their carbon footprint as well as meet the new EU battery regulations, it won't make sense to ship in material from elsewhere," said Schreiber. "The battery is an EV's biggest single source of embedded carbon. One with CAM made from recycled metals has up to 74% fewer embedded emissions."

Altilium uses a third-party

5%
The proportion of used EV batteries believed to be recycled each year in the UK

TIPPED RISE OF RECYCLED MATERIAL IN BEVs



Source: T&E

Refining black mass at scale for reuse in an EV battery is the aspiration supplier to handle the first stage of its recycling process. This involves shredding used batteries and extracting their crucial metals in the form of a powder called black mass, which Altilium then refines.

Most of the feedstock comprises failed and damaged batteries, rather than those at the end of their useful life. There are no accurate figures on how many end-of-life batteries exist but the industry expects to see appreciable numbers of them coming to the market after 2030.

REFINING BLACK MASS IS THE GOAL

Meanwhile, the UK's first at-scale lithium ion battery recycling plant owned by Recyclus Group has just dispatched 111 tonnes of black mass to Glencore, a global mining and recycling company, which, like Altilium, will separate out the metals and refine them but using its own process.

"Since we started recycling at scale in 2023, our output of black mass has increased year on year," said Robin Brundle, Recyclus Group co-founder and director. "This year, we plan to process 5000 tonnes of batteries but we have the capacity to process 22,000."

Recyclus's plant in Wolverhampton handles all types and sizes of used lithium ion batteries, with used EV batteries accounting for around 60%.

Brundle says the firm has cracked the recycling side in terms of harvesting black mass and now, like Altilium, is planning to move into processing. "The holy grail is refining the metals in black mass to such a quality that they can go back into an EV battery," he said. "With an automotive company, we're developing a pilot plant that will separate and purify the black mass at scale here in the UK to exactly that level, while minimising the number of 'touchpoints' in the process so that it is economic."

Brundle believes that if successful, the firm's move into processing will, in around five years, coincide with car and battery makers wanting back their old batteries to extract, process and reuse black mass in their new ones. "We'll be able to put our plant under their roof and do the work for them," he said.

JOHN EVANS

Renault 5 was the top-selling EV among retail buyers in April

NEW CAR SALES FALL BUT EVs AND PHEVs ON THE UP

UK SALES OF new electric and plug-in hybrid cars grew in April, despite a drop in the overall number of new cars sold.

EVs and PHEVs recorded year-on-year increases of 8.1% (to 24,558) and 34.1% (to 14,073) respectively.

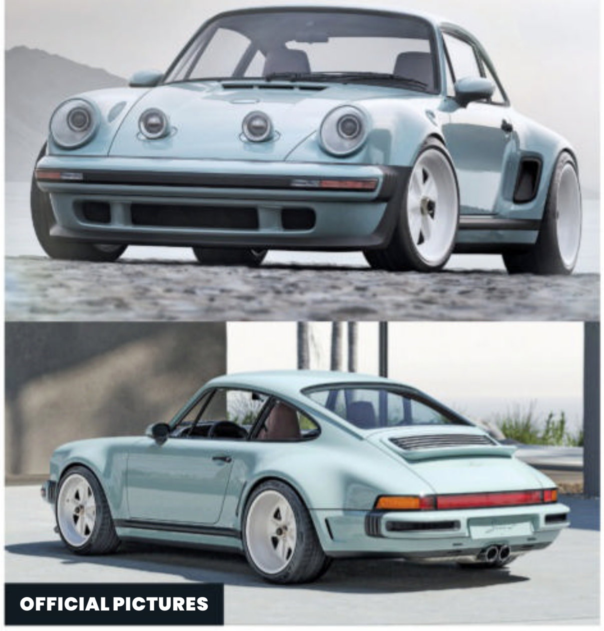
The Renault 5 was the best-selling EV among retail buyers in its first full month on sale. "It shows you just how many people are prepared to consider going electric," said Renault UK boss Adam Wood.

Overall, however, registrations fell 10.4% to 120,331, making it the worst April since 2022. This was driven by a 22% drop for pure-petrol and mild-hybrid cars, which meant their market share dipped just below half of all new car sales.

Fleets accounted for most registrations but sales dropped 11.9% to 71,520. The retail market fell by 7.9% to 46,490.

SINGER UNMASKS COOL 911

Singer has revealed a new 911 restomod – a fresh take on the wide-bodied, naturally aspirated Carrera from the 1980s. It packs a re-engineered 420bhp flat six that can rev to 8000rpm, a bespoke suspension set-up and a stiffened chassis. Styling features include an additional pair of pop-up headlights.



OFFICIAL PICTURES

Grapevine

MARK TISSHAW

Miller: "It's important every single person on the line can talk to you"

IF THE MANUFACTURE, sale and distribution of new cars wasn't complex enough, keeping those cars on the road is a whole other story. For Stellantis UK, at the heart of that operation is its new parts distribution centre at Ellesmere Port: a 60,000-square-metre site where 140,000 different types of parts are stacked 14 metres into the air.

Parts are sourced, packed and shipped 24/7 at breakneck speed by 234 staff to 19 regional hubs, which then deliver to almost 1000 sites where parts are needed. Four million parts are delivered each year.

Leading this centre is Diane Miller, who is enjoying the latest high-profile role in a stellar 34-year career in manufacturing. She is still transitioning from her previous role as plant director of Ellesmere Port, which included an 18-month shutdown and furloughing of staff at the plant to turn it into a cutting-edge electric van-making facility.

During the shutdown, Miller's job was more akin to that of a construction manager while the plant was reconfigured. Then she had to manage the sometimes reluctant return to work of furloughed staff, before a bigger issue hit soon after the plant reopened: the slowdown in demand for electric vans. That sparked questions about Ellesmere Port's viability. The solution to keep the plant productive was to build painted bodies and send them to a plant in Algeria for final assembly.

So does working in manufacturing require wider entrepreneurial and business skills? "Definitely," says Miller. Plants "will do whatever is required and come up with some really innovative ideas to do something different".

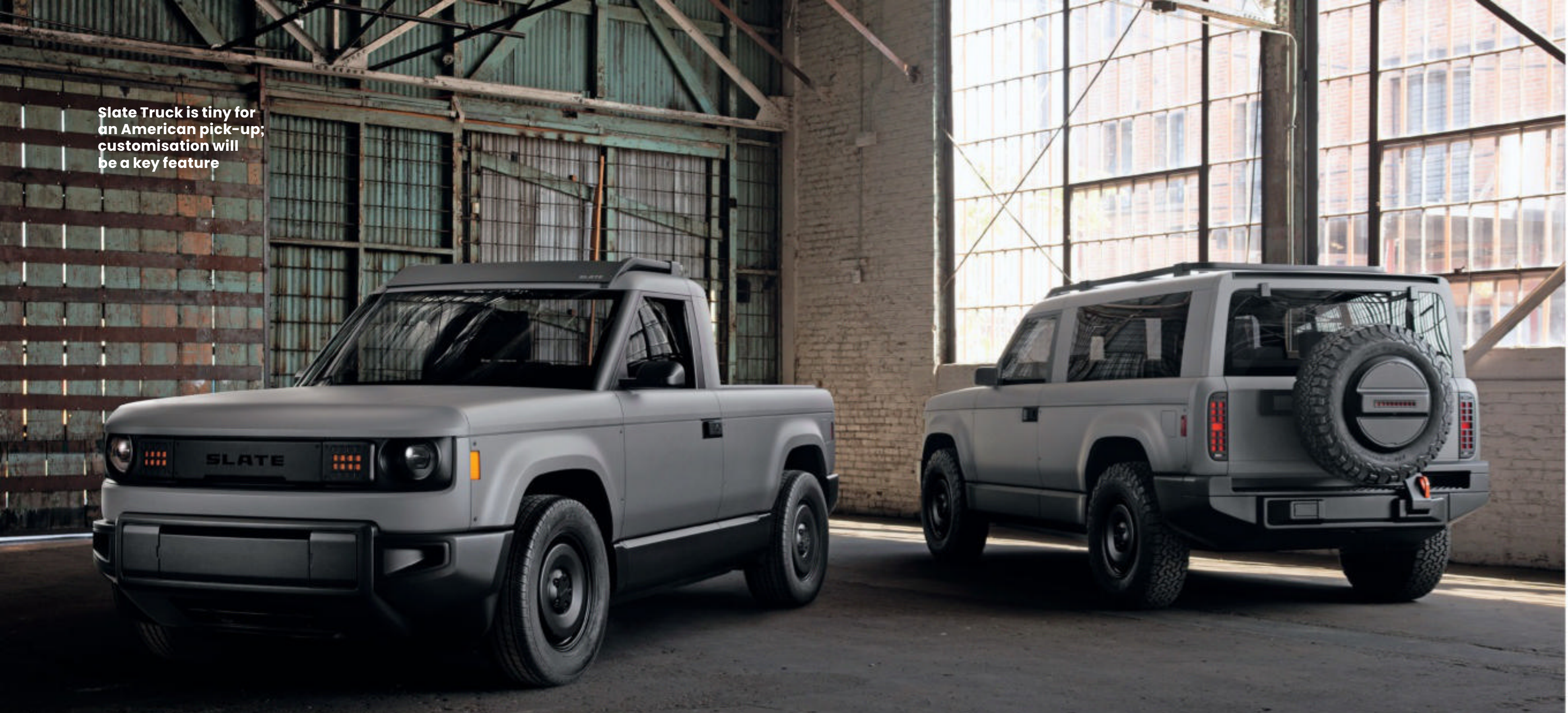
That's how, for instance, Ellesmere Port got its own shipping lane and worked with a shipping company for a roll-on/roll-off port just over a mile from the factory.

Miller says: "People come up with ideas. They build things. They would make a table or make a trolley: they'll do anything they can think of to make things more efficient and to make more money than other plants, because we always worry about the cost to make ourselves competitive with all of Europe."

When Miller arrived at her new role, she thought it would "be a more automated process like Amazon is trying to do" yet it is a more manual process. But that works, because a large number of the staff have a manufacturing background so they "have a very can-do attitude" and are "very, very flexible". The parts centre is already the best in Europe for customer service and satisfaction.

Quietly spoken and clearly a great listener, Miller says "it is totally important that every single person on the line can talk to you". Only then can you understand how things really work, she says, and how things can be made better. "If you try to support and help people, they will appreciate that and tell you the best and most efficient way to do things."

"Plants will do whatever is required and come up with really innovative solutions"



Slate Truck is tiny for an American pick-up; customisation will be a key feature

SLATE TRUCK: YOU’LL LOVE IT, AND NOT JUST FOR ITS PRICE

Affordable cars must also be desirable, says designer of £20k EV pick-up

The design boss of Slate Auto, the American EV start-up backed by investors including Amazon founder Jeff Bezos that plans to launch a bare-bones, compact pick-up truck for £20,000 in 2027, believes “people deserve to have a car that they can afford” and the concepts of desirability and affordability should be “inseparable”.

Speaking exclusively to Autocar from the Car Design Event in Munich, Germany, Tisha Johnson said the “clear, overwhelming response” to the Slate Truck’s unveiling last month had been “outstanding and somehow surprising” but ultimately reflective of the desire for more affordable yet still attractive cars.

Prior to joining Slate, Johnson was at Volvo’s North American design studio, primarily focused on interior development, before stints at appliance manufacturer Whirlpool and furniture maker Herman Miller.

Asked if those experiences have informed the utilitarian, functional design of the Truck, and whether it could be considered an appliance rather than a car, Johnson said: “I haven’t contemplated it as an appliance. When we first started talking about what we were going to do, there were two objectives that were inseparable. The first thing was to provide a car that people could afford and the second was to make it desirable.

“And that is exactly why I knew I was in the right place, because [those things] should be inseparable. People deserve to have a car that they can afford.”

Johnson: Slate Auto’s design boss

Indeed, the Truck is tipped to be one of the most affordable pick-ups – electric or otherwise – on sale in the US, with a targeted starting price of just $27k (£20k) before incentives. That’s on par with the entry-level, petrol-engined Ford Maverick and roughly half the price of the Ford F-150 Lightning – America’s cheapest electric truck.

Crucial to the Truck’s low list price – and, argues Johnson, its mass appeal – is a stripped-back cabin featuring manual seats, no stereo as standard and a device mount in place of a touchscreen.

“We’re not showing up with a bunch of fancy screens that some would say are corrupting the interior environment,” said Johnson. “Let people nest their phone or a tablet then just get back to the act of driving.”

As well as helping customers to “declutter their lives”, this helps to keep the cost of manufacturing down and for Slate to “pass dollars back to our customers”. It’s an approach similar to that taken by the Dacia Spring and Citroën ë-C3, among Europe’s cheapest EVs.

The second pillar of Slate’s ethos – that affordable cars can also be desirable – manifests in a wealth of personalisation options for the Truck. This ranges from vibrant liveries and chunky cladding to the choice of DIY kits that convert the Truck into a straight-backed SUV or a fastback crossover, for example.

“We want people to love the car,” said Johnson, “and that emotional impact and experience was prime for us as a design group: really evoking an emotional response, love in particular.”

The commercial implications of this approach are significant, too: Slate is able to build just one basic model line at its factory in Indiana, thereby minimising costs, yet appeal to as wide a demographic as possible.

“We kept it simple: one vehicle type that is manufactured off the line, and then tons of possibilities from there,” said Johnson.

“It’s really an intentional turn in a different direction.”

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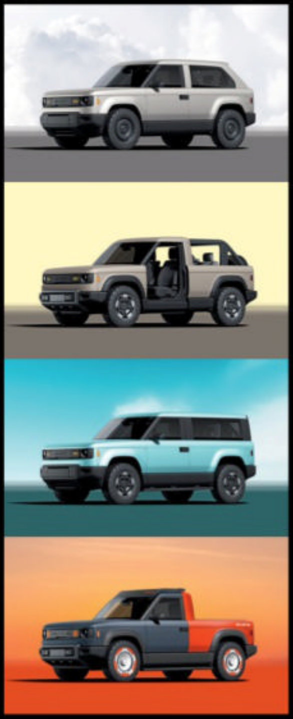


COULD SLATE GO GLOBAL?

In a word, no. At least not immediately.

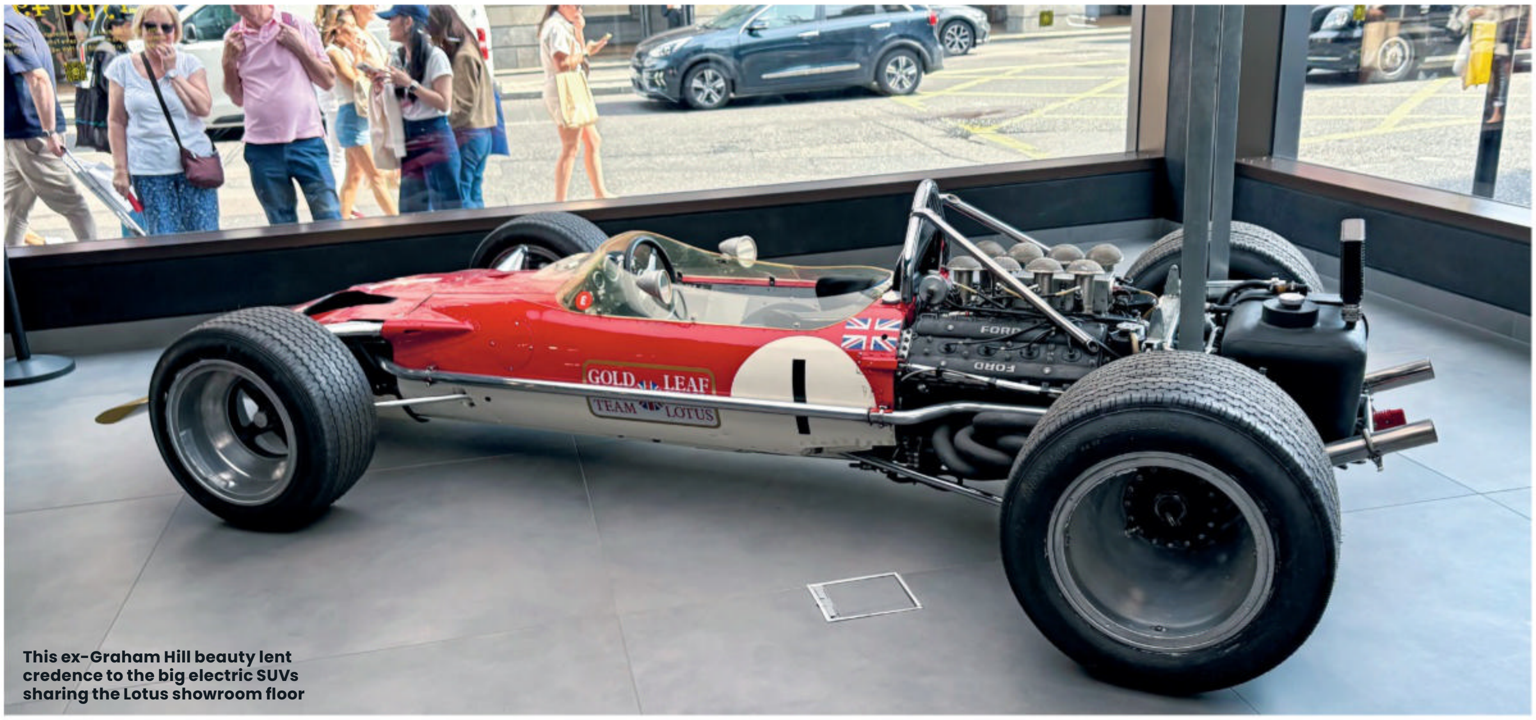
Slate Auto’s head of design, Tisha Johnson, said that the nascent company is “focused on an American truck that we can deliver in the US. That is fully our focus.”

The Truck has been designed precisely to appeal to American customers and to comply with all the US’s LCV homologation rules, and the possibility of exporting it worldwide is not currently on the radar.

The UK’s rules about importing and registering foreign vehicles are much more relaxed than the US’s, though (making it fairly easy to get a new Ford F-150, for example), so the prospect of running a left-hand-drive Slate Truck on British roads in the next few years can’t be ruled out.

MY WEEK IN CARS

Steve Cropley



This ex-Graham Hill beauty lent credence to the big electric SUVs sharing the Lotus showroom floor

MONDAY

Wandering London's packed Piccadilly, swerving red buses and kamikaze pedestrians, my eye fell on one of the greatest racing cars of all time, this beautiful Gold Leaf Lotus 49B, taking pride of place in the company's plush showroom opposite The Ritz.

The 49 could hardly be more significant in grand prix history: it introduced the Cosworth-Ford DFV V8 engine and won first time out with Jim Clark driving. It later pioneered the use of aerofoil wings for downforce and introduced advertising to Formula 1 cars.

This actual car carried Graham Hill to Monaco wins in 1968 and 1969 – the only time one car has ever won the same event in successive years.

My sighting vividly brought back a time, decades ago, when Cosworth and Lotus were celebrating a 49 anniversary at Donington Park. One of the car's creators, Dick Scammell, by then boss of Cosworth, did several stirringly noisy demonstration laps. When he stepped out of the car, in a typically blowhard hack's style I said something cheesy like: "Gosh, Dick, it must be amazing to have helped create such a fabulous car." Scammell admirably voiced the dissatisfaction felt by all good engineers, for whom projects are never finished. "Whenever I look at this bloody car," he said, "I wonder why we didn't do it better…"

> **"I wonder why we didn't do this bloody car better"**

Jochen Mass: F1 star, Le Mans winner and a really nice guy

TUESDAY

I've just spent another happy Polestar week, this time in a 4, which just happens (in my opinion) to be one of the most elegant-looking modern saloons going. This was the top-end £67,000 Dual Motor version, with 536bhp to deploy through four driven wheels and a promised range of 367 miles, which turned out to be the truth.

I couldn't get the driving position right at first but eventually did. I also had initial trouble fathoming the screen-based tweaks needed to disable all the superfluous assistance systems and chimes needed for calm progress (I had been driving a 3, which was different).

In the end, I sorted everything, finding a quiet, smooth, luxurious machine beneath it all. This taught me something I was supposed to know already: that you should get thoroughly familiar with the controls and switchgear of a new car before you complain about it. In the end, it will probably be fine.

WEDNESDAY

I'm very sorry to hear of the death of Jochen Mass, the former F1 and endurance racer, who struck me – and most people he met – as a really nice guy. Obituaries have understandably concentrated on his grand prix and big-time Porsche careers, but I remember him in later life as a cheerful, approachable bloke with no airs, who indulged his abiding love of cars by driving a huge variety of classics all over the world.

My one decent conversation with Mass was during the Mille Miglia, years ago, where his 300 SL 'Gullwing' and our XK120 were parked together at the roadside, waiting to cross a time control. His knowledge of Jaguar's famous NUB 120 car was detailed and entirely unexpected. Not so unexpected was the speed at which his flying Mercedes diminished in size once he decided it was time to go.

THURSDAY

Just how wide is the average American bum? Not as wide as Volkswagen thinks, apparently. US regulators have recalled the ID Buzz MPV because the third row of seats is deemed wide enough for three people yet has only two sets of seatbelts and two head restraints. Instead of simply being certified for two occupants, the seat has been declared "non-compliant with federal safety requirements" and must be modified. What nonsense.

AND ANOTHER THING

Business at Ellesmere Port (of which more soon) encouraged me to drive there in a Vauxhall Combo Life Electric, a 'civilian' version of the four-brand Stellantis van that nowadays flows from the factory's production lines. What excellent transport it was: comfortable, smooth, soft-riding and enjoyable to drive. It reminded me fondly of the Citroën Berlingo Multispace that our family ran for 20 years.

GET IN TOUCH
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PRIOR CONVICTION

Matt Prior

“It’s a tie-dye sort of place,” says the woman behind the counter of a petrol station cafe in upstate New York when I ask her what Woodstock is like, because it’s nearby and my road trip has no definitive destination.

I’d thought it was just a quaint town near the Catskill Mountains, but when she explains, I realise it’s *that* Woodstock – the one from the famous 1960s rock festival that promised ‘three days of peace and music’ and whose cultural impact shook the world. But despite the fact that the festival actually took place 60 miles from Woodstock and was 56 years ago, the town clearly retains its ‘peace and love’ vibe.

My server wasn’t wrong. It’s normal to see Trump flags and signs in rural New York, because it’s the big city that’s the state’s most liberal part and Americans are more vocally political than the British; an occasional ‘Liberal Democrats Winning Here’ sticker is about as boisterous as we get. But you won’t find many Republican signs near Woodstock.

“Presidents come and go, but Wu-Tang is forever,” reads one alternative. “Make America groovy again,” adds a CND-symbolled T-shirt in a shop window.

Aside from the city, Woodstock is in one of New York’s most liberal areas: it voted 58% Democrat in the 2024 presidential election. And it is to America what Glastonbury is to England: almost a parody of peace and love. On this Sunday afternoon there is, honestly, a drum circle on the village green, which is bordered by a vegan cafe and a herbal remedy shop.

Then I notice something else: the Subarus. Lots and lots of Subarus. More in one place than anywhere I’ve ever been, by miles. In one car park (I realise this isn’t a scientifically rigorous survey), almost 20% of the cars are Subarus.

WOODSTOCK
MAKE AMERICA
Groovy AGAIN!
Woodstock, New York

Complete the look with a GMC trucker hat

It turns out that this isn’t entirely coincidental. This is a fact more widely known in the US than it is in the UK: in the 1990s, Subaru of America surveyed who was buying its cars, and while it had expected the vets, outdoorsy types and teachers it identified as customers, there was also a group that it hadn’t foreseen: lesbians.

When it and its marketing agencies looked into this, the fit made sense: these were women with decent incomes who were less likely to have children and who had outdoorsy hobbies, so Subarus were what they were buying.

Subaru figured that, while there might be pushback in conservative areas, it should start running gay-targeted adverts, combining selling the virtues of the car as a country wagon with a knowing wink for its target audience.

“Get out, and stay out,” ran one advert. “It’s not a choice, it’s the way we’re built,” said another, sort of selling the 4x4 powertrain. “At least we’ve got our *priorities* straight,” read a 2004 Forester advert ostensibly about safety.

> **“It had expected the vets and teachers – but not the lesbians”**

While Subaru UK was selling Impreza Turbos to young men who couldn’t get a girlfriend, Subaru of America was selling Outbacks to women who could.

It had thought its campaign might be divisive, and it wasn’t wrong. Lots of consumers, target audience or not, enjoyed the ads, but it also received letters of complaint from conservatives threatening to boycott the brand – although, its research suggested, not from anyone who had previously bought a Subaru anyway.

And those turn-of-the-century adverts gave the brand a reputation in the US that it retains now. If you’re liberal, you’re more likely to buy a Subaru; if you’re conservative, you’re more likely to take against it.

Opinion polling firm YouGov’s bipartisan brand rankings for 2024 found that “28% of liberal Americans [and 33% of gay women] would consider purchasing a Subaru but just 16% of American conservatives feel the same”.

Subaru leads all car makers with this 12-point difference, ahead of Honda (10 points) and Volkswagen (eight).

For conservatives’ most favoured brands – Ford, Chevrolet and GMC – the difference the other way was smaller: 29% of conservatives would consider a Ford but so still would 23% of liberals.

There are practical reasons to own a Subaru in the north-eastern US, of course: they have proper four-wheel drive and it snows in winter. But that isn’t the only explanation for the fact that, while most small American towns reverberate to the sound of Detroit V8s, the bongos of Woodstock are accompanied by the gentle hum of a Subaru’s sensible all-season tyres.

GET IN TOUCH
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WOODSTOCK SHOP

Woodstock was once full of hippies. Now it’s all Outbacks and Foresters

RACING LINES

Damien Smith

Piastri again elevated himself above his more experienced McLaren team-mate in Miami

Deep breaths; don't panic; keep the faith. That has to be the line for both Lando Norris and Lewis Hamilton this week as Formula 1 returns to Europe for a triple-header, starting at Imola on Sunday, followed by Monaco and Barcelona.

Norris has fallen to a 16-point deficit with a quarter of the season gone to McLaren team-mate Oscar Piastri, who has calmly ticked off four wins from six races. The young Aussie is driving like a world champion and set a contrast in the previous grand prix in Miami that will sit uncomfortably for Norris. Both needed to pick their way past F1's Venus flytrap – the intransigent Max Verstappen – without getting a nasty prick. Piastri did so clinically and relatively quickly, pressing Red Bull's quadruple champion into braking too late into turn one, then cutting back inside to execute a perfect pass. Norris, having been fumbled off the track by Verstappen at the start, took longer to plot his way past. He criticised Verstappen for "not racing very smart" in compromising his own progress rather than bowing to the inevitable, but pots and kettles sprung to mind. Norris has the speed to change the narrative, and he must do so at Imola.

As for McLaren, what a transformation. "Two years ago here in Miami, we were genuinely the slowest team. I think we got lapped twice," pointed out Piastri. "To now have won the grand prix by over 35 seconds is unbelievable."

I will admit that I didn't think they had it in them after years of mediocrity, that such days just wouldn't be possible with customer Mercedes power. I'm very happy to be proved wrong on that count. All credit to CEO Zak Brown and especially to team principal Andrea Stella, architect of the revival. This is what clear-eyed and measured leadership can do.

HAMILTON'S EXASPERATION

As for Hamilton, he faces the tifosi for the first time as a Ferrari driver this weekend buried in a marsh of mediocrity. In Miami, Charles Leclerc and the seven-time champion ran different tyre strategies but couldn't rise above seventh and eighth. That's just where the SF-25 is at right now.

> **"The contrast will sit uncomfortably for Norris"**

Hamilton's sarcastic exasperation on the radio over his team's dithering on a team orders call was justified, but he won't be ruled by heat-of-the-moment frustration. There's a pleasing mutual respect between the two Ferrari drivers and both will put in the graft to lift the team. Remaining united to the cause will be key and, like for Norris, all is far from lost for Hamilton. Yet also like his compatriot, he really could do with a decent Imola. Time for a steady hand.

RIP JOCHEN MASS

Dashing, with his mess of curly hair, clear blue eyes and wide-open smile, Jochen Mass was a racing driver archetype in the 1970s and 1980s. The German was a true free spirit with a love for sailing that matched his devotion to motor racing, and perhaps it was his teenage adventures in the merchant navy that bestowed him with the healthy perspective of rarely taking his sport too seriously – even if such an attitude was already out of step with an increasingly hard-edged racing world.

History repeated itself at Donington as a Brundle triumphed in a big Jag

There was only a single victory from Mass's 105 grand prix starts, and he took no pleasure from it, given the tragedy of the truncated 1975 Spanish GP, in which four people were killed by Rolf Stommelen's Hill crashing over the barriers.

I remember him best in Rothmans overalls as a charismatic factory Porsche Group C sports car racer, although it was in a Sauber-Mercedes that he won the Le Mans 24 Hours in 1989.

But set aside the landmark stats: Mass brought a natural joy and infectious enthusiasm to motor racing, and that's how he stamped his mark. At 78, another beloved figure from the golden past is gone – but never forgotten.

THE BRUNDLE PARALLEL

Martin Brundle was on Sky F1 commentary duty in Miami. Meanwhile, back in the UK, his son Alex was at Donington Park revelling in old racing cars at the circuit's annual classic festival. Among them was the white and green Jaguar XJ-S you see here, in which he lucked into an inherited win in the Gerry Marshall Trophy, sharing with owner Simon Lewis.

It just so happens that 42 years earlier, on 1 May 1983, a young hotshot focused mainly on giving Ayrton Senna a serious headache in Formula 3 made a guest appearance for his old mentor Tom Walkinshaw at the Donington 500km European Touring Car round. Switching his usual Ralt for a hulking XJ-S, Martin was the driving force behind an unlikely victory. Alex, also a TV commentator who sounds uncannily like his old man, enjoyed the historical parallel in a car painted in identical colours.

Motorsport: it really is all about going around in circles.

GETTY IMAGES

YOUR VIEWS

WRITE TO autocar@haymarket.com

THE 1980s PICANTO

Your article about driving a Kia Picanto in Jersey ('Rock star', 26 March) brought back wonderful memories of events linked to both.

I worked for British Car Auctions during the mid-1980s and some of the many notable closed sales (trade only) were of regular volume transporter loads of Mk2 950cc Ford Fiestas direct from Jersey, still with 'J' plates attached. Ford had seen a way to supply ultra-low-mileage stock direct to its dealers by registering these cars with rental firms, bringing them back just a few months later to the mainland, sometimes still with delivery miles, and putting them straight to auction.

Mainly flat red, white and blue in colour (how patriotically appropriate), in Popular Plus and L trims, with desirable tilt sunroof, logbook (UK reg plates pending) to follow, they sold well, the market being able to absorb these numbers due to the evergreen popularity ('scuse the pun) of the model.

I was able to get one and add extra cover on top for my late mother.

I later ran a 54-plate Mk1 Kia Picanto 1.1 SE. Amazing spec: remote central locking, four electric windows, alloys, disc brakes all round, air conditioning, tints and just 119g/km of CO_2 so £30 VED. Oh, and metallic black paint with zesty orange cloth trim. Great fun.

Francis Samuels
East Renfrewshire

NEUTRAL ZONE

I was surprised to read Matt Saunders telling us to use neutral to freewheel downhill and along motorways, apparently in an effort to improve on 70mpg-plus, which hardly seems worth the effort (Toyota Prius Road Test, 23 April).

When I was learning to drive in Coventry in the early 1960s, I was taught that coasting was dangerous, because I wouldn't be in full control of the vehicle.

Perhaps Matt means us to knock it into B (brake) for those downhill sections and when approaching traffic lights; the first gives control and the second improves MPG. Both work well in our 2019 Mk4 Prius.

Peter Bull
New Westminster, Canada

On long, slightly downhill sections of motorway, the Prius ends up pegging itself back, because it won't truly freewheel, and neutral noticeably frees it up, especially with that slippery body. Not necessary, perhaps, but it does make a positive difference – MS, RL

Letter of the week

VAUXHALL NOSTALGIA

Thank you for your article and photos of Vauxhall's recently closed Luton factory, which I greatly enjoyed ('End of the line', 16 April).

My father worked as a salesman for a Vauxhall dealership in Cheshire for more than 20 years from the mid-1960s. The Vauxhalls I always wanted were the Chevette HSR (the dealership's head electrician bought one; by all accounts, he got it in one morning, the revs shot up and blew the engine; he sold it), the 'Droopsnoot' Firenza HP (pictured) and the Chevette Black Magic concept.

I can recall my dad disappearing for an overnight stay to Luton for awards ceremonies.

Last year, we gave the British Motor Museum a plastic jacket that I believe was given out by Vauxhall dealers and a 78rpm record celebrating the sound of the Victor.

Interestingly, regarding your archive article of 19 March, in the late 1970s my dad's view was that Vauxhall and Opel should get closer together, with Opel being the upmarket brand.

James Nicholson, Locks Heath, Hampshire

PRICE MISMATCH

In Murray Scullion's review of the Mini Aceman E (UK Verdicts, 23 April), the price shown in the Tech Spec is £28,905 but twice Murray quotes a price of £35k, and that is a lot of money for such a car. Did his test car have more than £6000 of options or was the £28,905 an error?

Steve Butterworth
Via email

The entry E Classic is £28,905 OTR, but options took our car to £34,350 – MSc

ONE BEEFCAKE, PLEASE

I enjoyed Richard Lane's musings on the new Mercedes-Benz E450d Estate (Testing, Testing, 2 April).

I've long lauded the benefits of turbo diesels for their effortless continent-crushing capabilities with great high-speed economy.

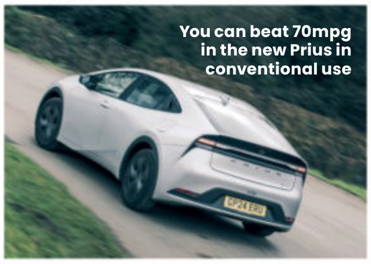
The use of 'beefcake' to describe the character of six-cylinder turbo diesels in the preceding road test (19 March) was superb too.

The main reason I bought a new BMW 530d in 2003 was to allow unhindered swift business trips around Germany, Austria, Switzerland and France. The purchase really stretched me financially but it was – and still is – worth it. Three to four client visits travelling 300-400 miles a day was both realistic and stressless.

It's a great shame that in the UK BMW now denies us both 3 Series and 5 Series diesels. I understand its rationale, due to BIK tax rates, but seeing that nearly 40% of new E-Classes sold in the UK are diesels, perhaps it should change its mind?

Dave Edmondson
Via email

Francis has fond memories of Fiestas like this



You can beat 70mpg in the new Prius in conventional use

Dave wishes his 2003 5 Series had a modern analogue

DO THE MATHS

Aston Martin in the first quarter of 2025 had negative EBIT [earnings before interest and tax] of £64.5m, or approximately £67,900 per car sold. To get to neutral EBIT, it would have to sell twice as many at the same margin. Given that volumes will be down following the US's imposition of tariffs and operating margins will compress, this seems like an unlikely outcome.

Aston Martin has two quarters of cash left at its Q1 burn rate. The outlook must be for revision of its financial guidance, severe job cuts (that's one way to get better EBIT), emergency financing and possibly a corporate sale (Geely?).

This is common across the sector, especially among EV makers: profits are too low to cover SGA [selling, general and administrative expenses] and interest, so there is a cash burn per unit. The only way to solve this is higher volumes, as margins will not expand.

I believe this shows that there will soon be a mass extinction event among low-volume and unprofitable car makers.

Peter Best
Ottawa, Canada

Aston Martin has stuck by its previous guidance and stated: "Whilst potential ramifications on the global economy from the recently announced US tariffs remain uncertain, Aston Martin still expects to make significant improvements across all key financial performance metrics in 2025, compared to the prior year."

SHOW SOME RESPECT

After a couple of swipes at Elon Musk in your 30 April magazine, I feel that I have to write in to defend the man and his products.

Musk is the best example of a polymath alive today, with his expertise in engineering, physics, computing etc, and his achievements are stunning: Tesla, SpaceX, Starlink, Grok AI, Optimus robot, Neuralink brain implant etc.

Why did we have to wait so long for Autocar to test the Cybertruck (31 December 2024) and why was the reviewer's main issue that it had sharp edges? It's a groundbreaking car, and the old Autocar would have treated it that way, but Mark Tisshaw couldn't help slipping 'divisive' into the text to reflect the mainstream media's issue with Musk and his recent association with Donald Trump.

Now we have Illya Verpraet saying "let's not talk about you-know-who" and Steve Cropley talking about "one weird bloke's personality and politics".

C'mon, guys: you need to grow a pair and not go along with the mainstream media narrative.

Chris Wright
Ebberston, North Yorkshire

Autocar always strives to remain politically neutral, and it's patently clear that Musk is divisive no matter where your personal sympathies lie. The Cybertruck delay was simply because we aren't often in the US. With both sides of the debate having now featured in these pages, I'll call time on Musk commentary until the next time he does something newsworthy – KC

Weekly winner

Letter of the week wins this ValetPro exterior protection and maintenance kit worth £48

GREAT REASONS TO BUY

Next week's issue

ON SALE 21 MAY

COMPARISON

CAN TESLA GET ITS MOJO BACK?

The new Model Y is out to reassert its dominance in the competitive electric SUV segment. We pit it against a key rival, Skoda's Enyaq Coupé

FEATURE

THE McLAREN F1 OF CAMPER VANS

Designer of the iconic hypercar turns a Ford Transit into a mobile home

ROAD TEST

TOYOTA LAND CRUISER

Now looks the part, but does it still deliver on and off road? We find out

EVERY WEEK

LIVING WITH A…

MINI ACEMAN

"Small footprint – big fun," claims its maker. We put that to the test as crossover EV joins our fleet

USED GUIDE

SKODA YETI

Quirky SUV with lots of space yet the footprint of a Golf. And owners love them – for very good reason

CONTENTS SUBJECT TO CHANGE

AUTOCAR

The original car magazine, published since 1895 'in the interests of the mechanically propelled road carriage'

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FIRST DRIVES

THIS WEEK'S HIGHLIGHTS

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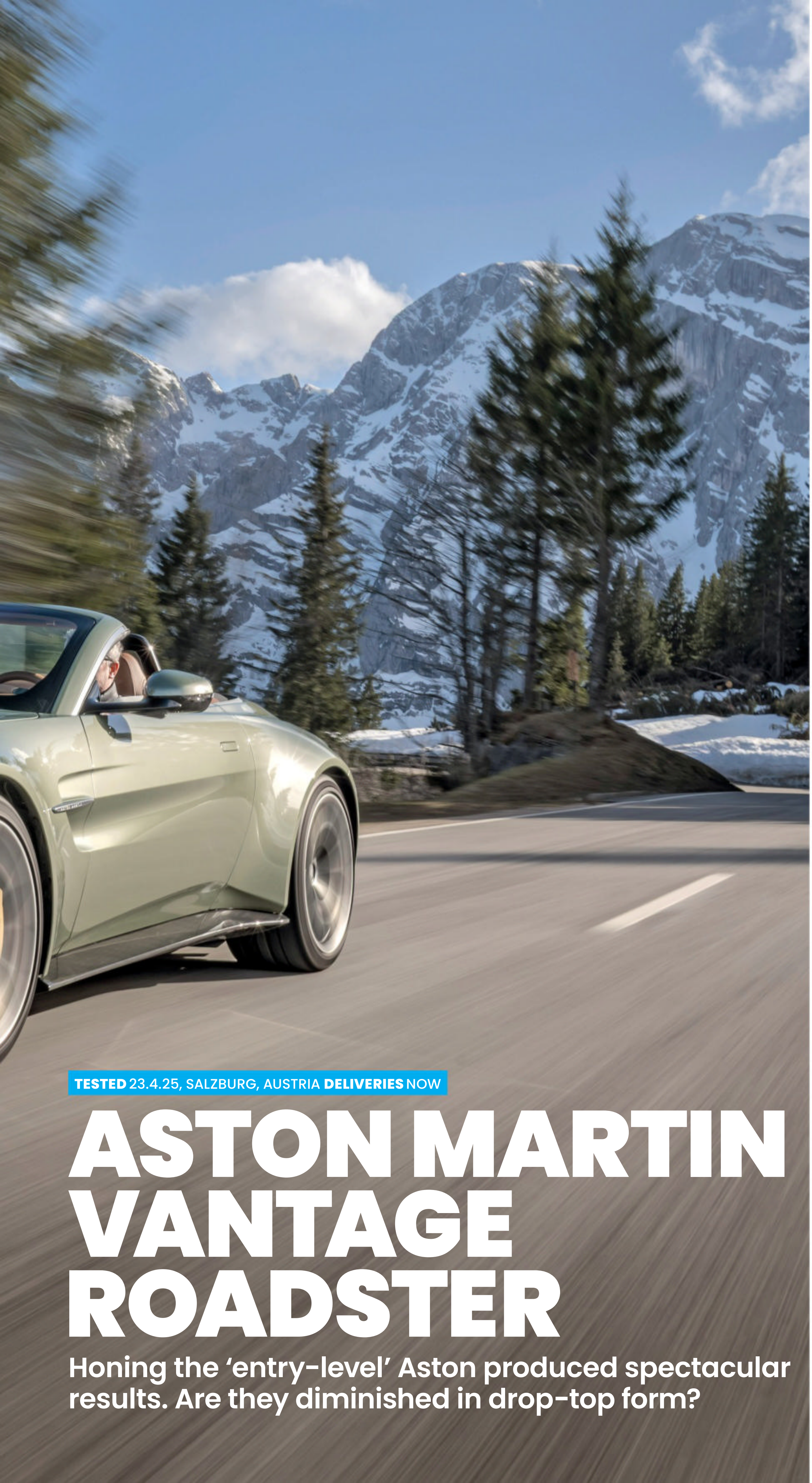
HOW WE TEST CARS

Autocar delivers several kinds of reviews on new cars, with different levels of technical and functional scrutiny. As the name suggests, our First Drives section typically addresses cars that we're driving for the first time – either in final production form or as late prototypes. Time in the car can be limited here, technical and equipment specification might not be finalised and some systems software may not be to production specification. For those reasons, First Drive reports don't have star ratings.

Once we have driven a car for a second time in the UK, in right-hand-drive form and typically at greater length, we will rate it, either as part of a shorter UK test report or as the subject of a full, instrumented Road Test.

In the latter case, we take empirical performance and refinement benchmarks from it at Horiba MIRA proving ground, as well as subjective limit handling impressions, plus key measurements of practicality, efficiency and kerb weight.

All UK tests and Road Tests receive proper verdicts with star ratings informed by everything we have learned and the combined impressions and experience of several testers.



TESTED 23.4.25, SALZBURG, AUSTRIA **DELIVERIES** NOW

ASTON MARTIN VANTAGE ROADSTER

Honing the 'entry-level' Aston produced spectacular results. Are they diminished in drop-top form?

Eyebrows were raised when an Aston Martin engineer, speaking at the Austrian launch of the new Vantage Roadster, suggested the spring and damper rates had been carried over wholesale from the coupé unaltered. For something without a proper carbonfibre tub, this would be irregular. When you lop the top off a coupé, the body often then needs to be dramatically strengthened, adding heft to a car whose axles are already no longer singing in perfect unison because torsional stiffness has plummeted. Custom suspension rates are devised to claw back some precision and cohesion – or at least enhance the perception of those attributes.

As it happens, the Vantage Roadster's rear dampers do run recalibrated software, but the change compared with the coupé is minimal and the front axle hasn't received any attention at all. So is this conversion a rush job? Budgets biting, perhaps? Nope. The Roadster simply doesn't need special treatment, apparently. So meagre is the weight gain over the coupé and so stiff is the aluminium chassis (thanks in part to the fact it was developed from the outset with both derivatives in mind) that from a dynamic standpoint the coupé and convertible are essentially the same. Given how keen and fun-loving the coupé is, that will be music to the ears of those in the market for a rip-snorting drop-top that really handles.

Here's another surprising stat: 6.8sec. Not the 0-62mph time, thankfully. Rather the time taken for the 'Z-fold' fabric roof to arc through its full scope in either direction. It really is a rapid bit of mechanical choreography. Porsche's 911 Cabriolet needs 12sec and Ferrari's Roma Spider a little longer still.

What makes the Vantage Roadster all the more impressive is that the weight gain from the roof mechanicals and all the other structural additions is also the lowest of this trio, at 60kg. Opt for a Roma Spider instead of a coupé ▸

Folding roof shrinks boot capacity but there's still a decent 200 litres here

AUTOCAR PODCAST

MY WEEK IN CARS

Steve Cropley

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TESTER'S NOTE

Aston has improved the legibility of the Vantage's digital dials – chiefly in regard to gear and engine speed – and added a shortcut button for the ADAS settings on the broad transmission tunnel. The same changes are being made to the coupé. **RL**

> **"It's an open-air muscle car with oodles of polish: Pontiac GTO meets Caterham Seven, with all the luxury"**

◂ and you're carrying 72kg more; in the 911 Carrera GTS Cabriolet, 80kg. Mind you, the Vantage is the heaviest outright.

Of course, much of the above was also true of the previous Vantage Roadster, introduced in 2021. Where this new version markedly differs from its predecessor concerns the driveline and vast contact patch, both of which are, like the suspension rates, transplanted directly from the current coupé.

That means you get a 656bhp (up 153bhp), 590lb ft (up 84lb ft) twin-turbocharged 4.0-litre V8 from Mercedes-AMG, driving through a ZF eight-speed torque-converter and an electronic limited-slip differential, all overseen by a stability control system with a superbly lenient midway setting before, should you turn it off entirely, you're given access to a multi-stage traction control system.

It's also worth noting that the Roadster now hits the same 202mph V-max as the coupé (and reaches 62mph only a tenth slower) and is fitted with the same 73-litre tank, for a touring range of 450 miles.

What you don't get is the same carrying capacity. The coupé's hatch opening gives it a boot bigger than that even of the Vanquish; if you open up the Roadster's bootlid, you will find notably less luggage space, if not so little as to be routinely problematic.

In any case, the tighter cavity comes in handy, because it means you can wedge your belongings in more tightly. The Roadster's visual muscle writes an almighty cheque, but it's one the driving experience mostly cashes, especially when the roof is stowed away. The experience is – hold the front page – as per the coupé, only with added hell breaking loose behind you.

Through mountain switchbacks there remains a faint nose-iness to the balance that wouldn't be so apparent in the sharper Roma or 911, but the Roadster's ability to remedy this with throttle is unparalleled. And while even in Sport+ mode there are flashes when the body works the Bilstein DTX dampers almost painfully hard, in general the Roadster has the control to keep everything hanging together, however far you push it.

It's an open-air muscle car with oodles of polish: Pontiac GTO meets Caterham Seven, with all the luxury. In layout and materials, this is easily now the most special cockpit in the class.

As for refinement? It's difficult to comment reliably when Austria's roads are so good, but you would expect the Roadster to feel very similar to the coupé in the UK. Which is to say not immune to road roar but generally easier company than the equivalent 911.

Aston could certainly have dialled the Roadster back a touch, making it more the riviera cruiser that the look hints at, but there's the DB12 Volante for that, and there is merit in offering a model every bit as dynamically capable and exciting as the Vantage coupé, only in convertible form. It's an unapologetic have-your-cake-and-eat-it play.

As somebody who generally veers towards the fixed-head option, I'd find it fairly hard to look past this drop-top. The handling is 2% less crisp, sure, but if you're looking for the last word in synaptic delight, the 911 GTS is more grittily communicative anyway and the Roma more fluid, whichever the derivative. That's not why you buy the Vantage, although it is a fine-handling car. You buy it for the looks, the noise, the sweetly doled-out oversteer, the cabin opulence, the long-distance capability and sense of satisfaction this car imparts. The coupé knits together those elements to lovable effect and, for a price, the Roadster takes the whole show up another notch still.

RICHARD LANE

Interior feels fabulous; in-house touchscreen system fits the bill

TECH SPEC

ASTON MARTIN VANTAGE ROADSTER

Pricey but has tons of charisma and few drawbacks. Possibly now the Vantage to have

Price £181,500
Engine V8, 3892cc, twin-turbo, petrol
Power 656bhp at 6000rpm
Torque 590lb ft at 2750-6000rpm
Gearbox 8-spd automatic, RWD
Kerb weight 1730kg
0-62mph 3.6sec
Top speed 202mph
Economy 23.0mpg
CO_2, tax band 279g/km, 37%
Rivals Ferrari Roma Spider, Porsche 911 Carrera GTS Cabriolet

TESTED 31.4.25, HERTFORDSHIRE **DELIVERIES** NOW

MERCEDES-AMG E53 HYBRID

Hot E-Class saloon ditches beloved V8 for a six-cylinder PHEV system

These are challenging times for Mercedes-AMG. Its four-cylinder plug-in hybrid C63 has flopped commercially, prompting a frantic back-pedal announcement that V8 power will return in the CLE 63 coupé (and might even make an appearance in the revised C-Class saloon and estates, due in 2026).

So where does that leave the new E53? For now, it's a replacement for the V8-powered E63 and it follows the same electrification template as the C63. That might sound concerning to Mercedes showroom staff, but in this AMG-flavoured E-Class the petrol part of the powertrain is a 3.0-litre straight six – not a four-banger – which in combination with a 161bhp electric motor produces a thumping 577bhp.

My test car also had the £7500 Pro Performance Package, which adds a Race Start mode that delivers a brief boost in outright energy to 603bhp – the same as in the old E63 S. Promising stuff.

There's no denying that the E53 looks the part, especially if you like your speedy saloons (there's also an estate) with a bit of Q appeal. It's not exactly a sleeper, but apart from its bespoke 20in alloy wheels, reprofiled bumpers, small bootlid spoiler, subtly wider front track and 'Panamericana' front grille, it could be mistaken for the AMG Line diesel driven by your head of finance.

This low-key approach continues when you thumb the starter button, because unlike in old-school AMG models, there's no peacocking show of aural bombast. Instead the car defaults to silent EV mode, and even engaging Sport or Sport+ emits little more than an almost apologetic woofle from the exhausts.

Work the engine harder and you're acutely aware of the rather naff synthesised engine note played through the car's audio speakers, which is a shame, because open a window and you will notice that the six-pot delivers a subtle but nicely cultured snarl when extended.

Clever suspension and all-wheel steering can't fully rein in the E53's heft and size

Still, I have no complaints about the performance on offer. Even in EV mode, the E53 offers enough urge to keep up with faster-moving traffic (and will do so for around 50 miles), while bringing the turbo 3.0-litre into play allows it to serve up sports car-humbling pace.

The low-speed torque fill offered by the motor results in instant low-speed response, helping the E53 gather speed with deceptive ease.

There's no adrenaline-pumping rush for the redline like in old pure-petrol AMG models, but in real-world terms the newcomer's effortless mid-range muscle makes it a devastatingly effective tool for shrinking straights.

So it's a shame that the nine-speed automatic gearbox isn't quite as effective, the torque-converter unit occasionally sending home a stuttering shift as it struggles to smoothly accommodate the car's two power sources.

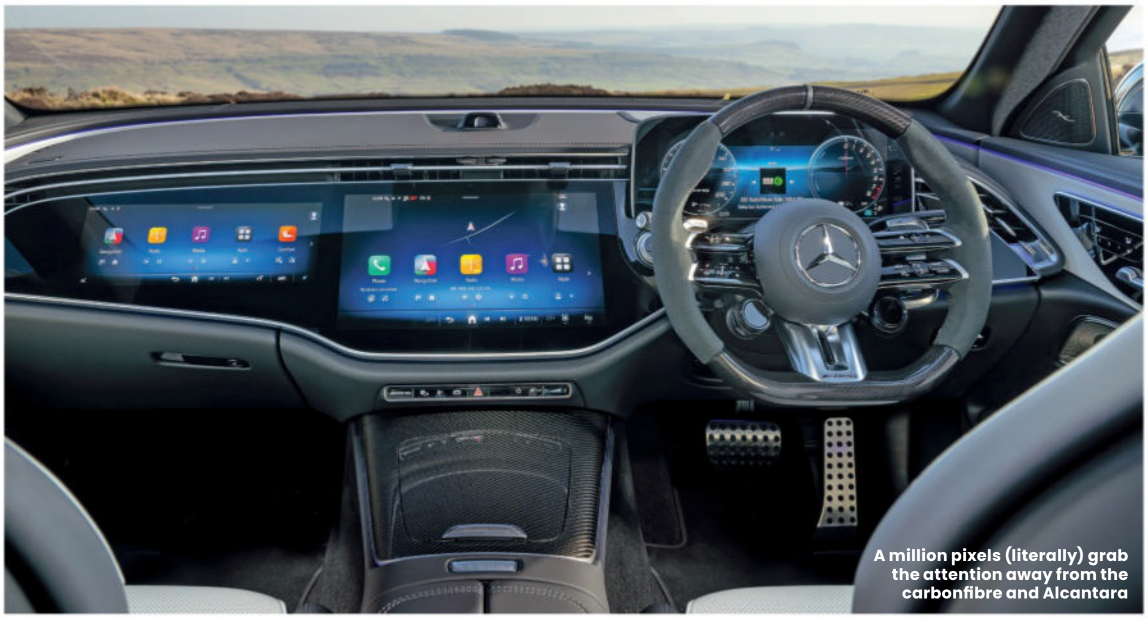
Like all the most potent AMG models, the E53 features 4Matic+ four-wheel drive as standard, which means traction is never an issue.

It also gets four-wheel steering, no doubt to help inject some fleet-footed agility into a car that tips the scales the wrong side of two tonnes and leaves a footprint that's nearly five metres long and two metres wide.

TESTER'S NOTE

With a claimed electric range of up to 60 miles, the E53 attracts a company car tax rate of 9%. That means a higher-rate earner will face a £3286 annual tax bill – half that of an entry-level E220d. **JD**

"Throw in a quick change of direction and there's curious looseness to its responses"



A million pixels (literally) grab the attention away from the carbonfibre and Alcantara

A similar system works well in the shorter CLE 53, but it's a mixed bag here. When slipping through traffic or slotting into a parking space, the benefits are clear-cut, helping the E53 feel more compact than those tape measure-stretching dimensions would suggest. Push on a little along some suitably sinuous roads and the car initially feels agile and responsive, but wind on lock quickly or throw in a fast, flick-flacking change of direction and there's curious looseness to its responses; a sense that the rear axle is taking a nano-beat to catch up with your requests.

The slightly wayward feeling continues with the suspension, which even in its tautest Sport and Sport+ modes fails to fully contain the car's mass. Lumps and compressions can result in a little raggedness that can make it a challenge to keep the E53 within your lane on narrow roads.

This is compounded by a curious torque-steer effect when mustering all of the powertrain's potential, the 4Matic+ system almost getting a little flustered as it deals with the torrent of torque.

Yet once the car is settled into a corner, it feels more natural, the steering offering a decent weighting and nicely paced rack.

Adding the Pro Performance Package also gets you an electronic limited-slip differential at the rear, which adds a little extra dose of on-throttle adjustability when you're firing out of a corner.

Dial everything back and the E53 proves to be a comfortable and cosseting companion. In their softest setting, the adaptive dampers help smother road-level imperfections, while the isolation from road and wind noise is almost S-Class-excellent.

The interior is spacious (although the hybrid gubbins means boot capacity shrinks from 540 to 370 litres) and has a rich look and feel, while my car's optional Superscreen full-width digital dash (£1495) never fails to impress occupants yet is surprisingly easy to use.

Whether you want top-notch refinement, club-class quality and dazzling tech to be the standout highlights of your supposedly driver-focused super-saloon is another matter.

JAMES DISDALE

TECH SPEC

MERCEDES-AMG E53 HYBRID 4MATIC+ NIGHT EDITION PREMIUM PLUS

Like the smaller C63, this E53 can't quite decide what it wants to be. Moreover, BMW's faster and more engaging M5 PHEV doesn't cost a lot more

★★★☆☆

Price £97,995
Engine 6 cyls in line, 2999cc, turbocharged, petrol, plus electric motor
Power 577bhp at 5800-6100rpm (603bhp with Race Start)
Torque 553lb ft at 2200-5000rpm
Gearbox 9-spd automatic, 4WD
Kerb weight 2390kg
0-62mph 3.8sec
Top speed 155mph
Battery 21.2kWh (usable)
Economy 282.5-313.9mpg
Electric range 58-60 miles
CO_2, tax band 21-22g/km, 9%
Rivals BMW M5, Porsche Panamera E-Hybrid

TESTED 6.5.25, DORSET **DELIVERIES** NOW

HYUNDAI INSTER

Quirky, well-equipped little EV seeks to eat the Renault 5's lunch

Small electric cars are all the rage at the moment, and the latest newcomer to the UK is the Hyundai Inster. Our first taste of the brand's smallest EV came last November in its native South Korea; now we've sampled it in right-hand-drive form to see how it stacks up against the Citroën ë-C3, Renault 5 and more.

The Inster is loosely based on the petrol-engined Hyundai Casper that has been sold in Korea since 2021, but its platform has been stretched and overhauled to accommodate a battery and an electric motor. Despite this, it measures only 3.8m in length and 1.6m wide, making the car shorter and narrower than its French rivals. And the Inster's compact dimensions have been cleverly disguised by chunky wheel arches and short overhangs that give it a pseudo-SUV aesthetic.

Three trims and two battery options are available.

The Standard Range model is powered by a 42kWh battery and 95bhp front-mounted electric motor for a 203-mile range, while the Long Range model gets a larger, 49kWh battery and a 113bhp motor for a 229-mile range.

Entry-level 01 trim starts from £23,495, and while that makes the Inster some £1500 dearer than the ë-C3, it gets a lot more standard kit, including a heat pump, a pair of 10.25in digital displays for the infotainment and instruments and adaptive cruise control.

For £26,745, you can have 02 trim, which adds heated seats and a heated steering wheel. That's pretty ambitious, since the basic version of the bigger-battery 5 is only £250 more yet has a longer range (249 miles), if no heated seats.

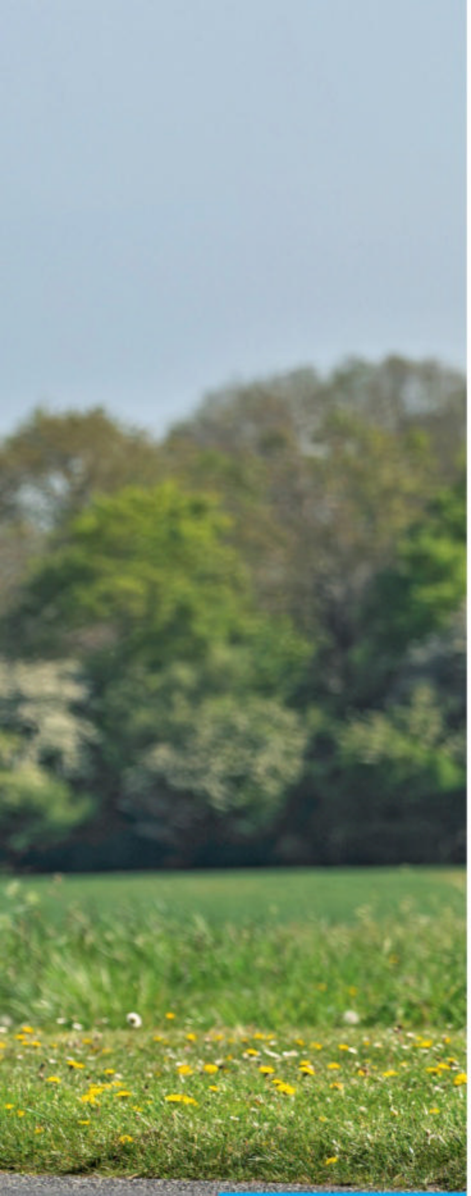
Or for £28,775, Cross trim gives the Inster a 4x4-inspired makeover.

Move inside and you might mistake the Inster for an SUV: its concave roof means there's plenty of head room for adults front and rear, while leg room in the back is practically limo-like.

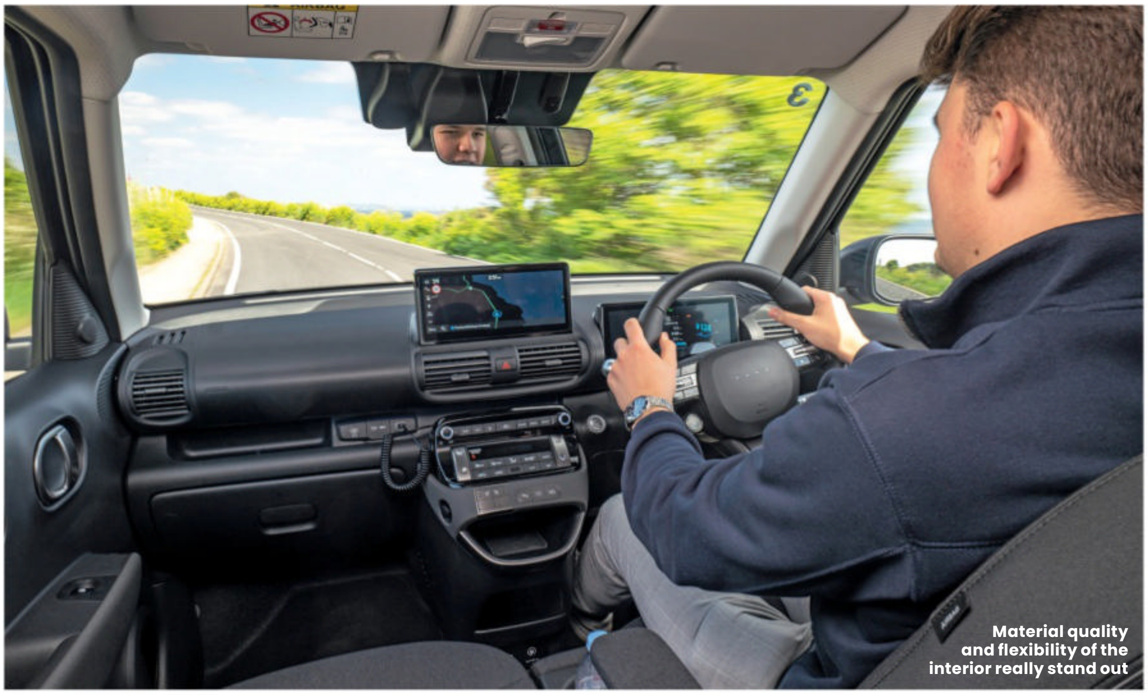
You can't escape how narrow the car is, however, so taller, broad-shouldered passengers might not find it all that roomy up front.

The seat bases are shallow and

Curious proportions – short and narrow but tall – give the Inster a distinctive look



"It's surprisingly mature on the open road, feeling controlled and pleasant to drive"



Material quality and flexibility of the interior really stand out

TESTER'S NOTE

My test car was fitted with the String Garnish. Silly name, but it's basically some elastic string on the doors for securely storing smaller items – or strumming like a guitar. **SP**

the backrests lack a bit of lumbar support, but the fixed armrest offers some comfort and the cupholders that sit underneath are handy.

Such generous passenger space limits the boot capacity to 280 litres, but you can slide the two rear seats forwards independently to increase the volume. You can even fold down the front pair to store longer items or lie down and take a nap.

The touchscreen infotainment system is easy enough to use but not as intuitive as the Google-based set-up in the 5. Furthermore, it can be a little sluggish to respond to inputs and its Apple CarPlay and Android Auto functionality isn't wireless.

The digital dash is graphically strong and customisable. And for all the touchscreen-dominated cars we test these days, it's refreshing to step down into a small EV and have a neat cluster of large, tactile physical buttons to prod and poke. You don't need to take your eyes off the road to adjust the fan speed or temperature and the row of buttons for the touchscreen are useful for function-hopping on the move.

The plastic on the doors, dash and lower down by your feet may feel cheap, but there's a robustness to the cabin that suits the Inster's vibe and cloth-like material on various touchpoints adds a premium air.

For city-scything jaunts, the Inster is the ideal companion. It is generally pliant, soaks up lumps and bumps well and only seems to come unstuck over larger potholes and severe imperfections.

For its size, the car is surprisingly mature out on the open road too, and while there's more jounce and head toss on country roads, it feels controlled and pleasant to drive.

There's plenty of grip through the corners (my test car's 17in wheels wore Michelin Pilot Sport 5 rubber) and the body is kept well in check.

I would, however, like a bit more feedback from the slow-geared steering, which is a bit numb.

There's little verve or agility to the way the Inster drives, though. With just 113bhp and 1423kg to haul along, it feels sluggish and takes more than 10sec to hit 60mph. There's a modicum of additional zip if you put it in Sport mode, but overall the Inster feels like a car in which to make steady progress.

Satisfyingly, it is competitively efficient: over extended testing my car regularly matched the official economy figure of 4.1mpkWh.

Overall, there's a lot to like about the Inster: it has a good range, a comfortable ride and an excellent interior that majors on versatility and space. But while it might be a more tempting proposition than A-segment EVs like the Fiat 500e, its niche positioning and ambitious pricing make it less competitive when pitched against the 5.

SAM PHILLIPS

TECH SPEC

HYUNDAI INSTER STANDARD RANGE 02

Easy-going EV hits the mark on space and efficiency, but quicker pace and keener pricing would help its case against B-segment rivals

★★★★☆

Price £26,745
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 113bhp
Torque 108lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, FWD
Kerb weight 1423kg
0-62mph 10.6sec
Top speed 93mph
Battery 49kWh (usable)
Range, economy 229 miles, 4.1mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Fiat 500e, Jeep Avenger, Renault 5

ROAD TESTS

AUTOCAR ROAD TEST 5747

MINI JOHN COOPER WORKS

One of the last petrol hot hatches standing faces our timing gear

MODEL TESTED
MINI JOHN COOPER WORKS
Price £33,265
Power 228bhp at 5000-6000rpm
Torque 280lb ft at 1500-4000rpm
0-60mph 5.8sec
30-70mph 4.5sec
Top speed 155mph (claimed)
Average economy 35.3mpg
Touring economy 42.0mpg
CO_2 emissions 154g/km
70-0mph 46.0m (17deg C, dry)

If someone had asked you a few years ago what would be the last two traditional supermini-based hot hatches to remain on sale, you might have guessed the Renault Clio RS and Ford Fiesta ST, or even the Hyundai i20 N. Would your money have been on the Mini John Cooper Works and the Volkswagen Polo GTI? Probably not.

It says something about the sheer momentum of big groups like BMW and Volkswagen. The petrol hot hatch has become a sufficiently marginalised kind of car that an entirely new one would struggle to get board approval: bad for the CO_2 quotas in Europe, not popular enough outside it. But there's no major reason for Volkswagen to stop making the Polo GTI just yet, and a JCW version has sneaked onto the price list of the refreshed Mini Cooper.

This fourth-generation (not counting the Issigonis cars) Mini, then, builds on its predecessor from 2013, using the same UKL platform and the same engines and gearboxes. The styling is brought in line with the EV's much cleaner look and the interior gets the same minimalist makeover, so this F66-generation Cooper is more than just a facelift. That there is a fast version is something to be upbeat about, but is it any good?

DESIGN & ENGINEERING

★★★⯪☆

PROS That it exists at all; genuine powertrain and suspension upgrades over standard Cooper; classic Mini looks
CONS Visually very similar to a Cooper with a Sport pack; no manual gearbox

Let's start with a quick note on naming, because it's easy to lose track of how the Mini range has ballooned over the past 25 years, particularly since there are now mirror petrol and electric line-ups.

For this generation, the Mini hatchback is known as the Cooper, which makes sense given that's what many people were calling it anyway. A suffix indicates which engine or battery and motor power it. The hot versions deviate slightly, and are called the Mini John Cooper Works. An electric version is due soon. As before, the petrol-powered Cooper is available as a three- and five-door hatch, and as a convertible. The JCW, however, is two-door only.

Rather confusingly, you need a keen spotter's eye to tell the proper John Cooper Works apart from any other Cooper with a Sport pack, because the latter gets the full works of spoilers, splitters and JCW badges. This risks devaluing the actual range-topper a little, but the good news is that when you dig down into the specification, the JCW is more than just a stickers-and-spoilers package.

R53 JCW pack was a dealer-fit option

It uses the Cooper S as its base, with the same 'B48' 2.0-litre turbocharged four-cylinder engine and seven-speed dual-clutch automatic gearbox, but there are some noteworthy upgrades. The engine produces 27bhp and a very significant 59lb ft more. Mini doesn't say where exactly that extra grunt comes from, but the unique exhaust might be a factor.

JCWs are the only modern Minis with visible exhaust pipes. The Countryman JCW has four of them, while the Cooper has a single, central exit. Most of the time, it actually breathes through a hidden downturned pipe, with the rally-style rear exit only opening under hard acceleration.

The chassis, too, uses the same fundamental hardware as the Cooper S, which is already more exotic than most superminis', with a multi-link rear axle. The JCW gets unique springs and dampers, and increased negative camber on the front axle for better turn-in. It also gains additional chassis bracing on the underbody to increase the torsional rigidity. If you spec the 18in wheels (17in is standard), you also have the option of a more performance-biased tyre.

Despite this list of upgrades, the new JCW seems less of a bespoke performance car than some of its predecessors. Limited-slip differentials were left to the aftermarket a few generations ago, but until recently it was possible to order your JCW with a manual gearbox and adaptive dampers. Both of these are now off the menu.

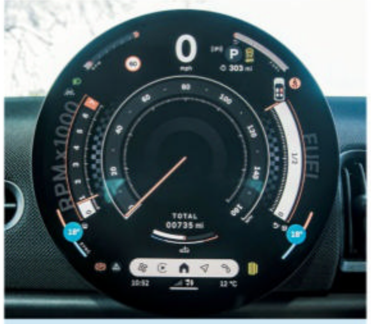
INTERIOR & MULTIMEDIA

★★★⯪☆

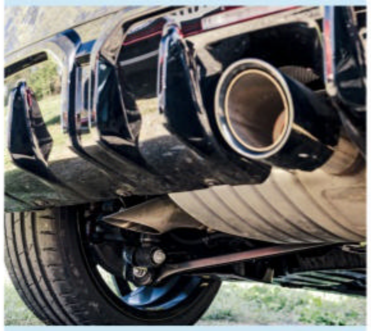
PROS Stylish; good driving position; more practical than you might expect
CONS Little differentiation from standard Cooper; form over function

If you materialised into the driver's seat of the new Mini JCW without seeing the exhaust, you would have no way of knowing which version you were in. The copious red accents, JCW insignias and perforated leather steering wheel are shared with the Sport trim of the standard car. And where previous generations might have offered a set of more serious bucket seats, the new JCW simply sticks with the standard items.

While the lack of differentiation from a normal Cooper is certainly disappointing, that is not to say this interior is devoid of charm or purpose, because this is one of the most distinctive supermini interiors around.



If you want to see a fully fledged tachometer, you have to put the car into 'Go-Kart' (ie Sport) mode and then press on the speedo to display this set of gauges. It looks cool, but also replaces everything else. Is it really so hard to put a proper tacho on the home screen?



The main exhaust box, including the hidden downturned exit, is the same as on the standard Cooper S. The JCW does get a single central exit, which is valved to open under hard acceleration. It looks unusual but is a nice reference to classic rally Minis.

Opening the long front door somehow adds a little sense of occasion – the Mini Cooper is one of the last remaining three-door hatchbacks. If you're tall, it's also refreshing to get into a small car without the B-pillar getting in the way.

As with the previous generation, you can sit incredibly low for a front-wheel-drive hatchback. The Alpine A290's and Toyota GR Yaris's seats seem perched by comparison. The seats themselves feel a little de-contented, mind. There's no more pull-out thigh bolster, and unless you spec the electrically adjustable memory seats (as part of the expensive Level 3 package), you don't even get adjustable lumbar support or cushion angle. They are comfortable enough but feel a little flat, and the amount of lateral support is only adequate.

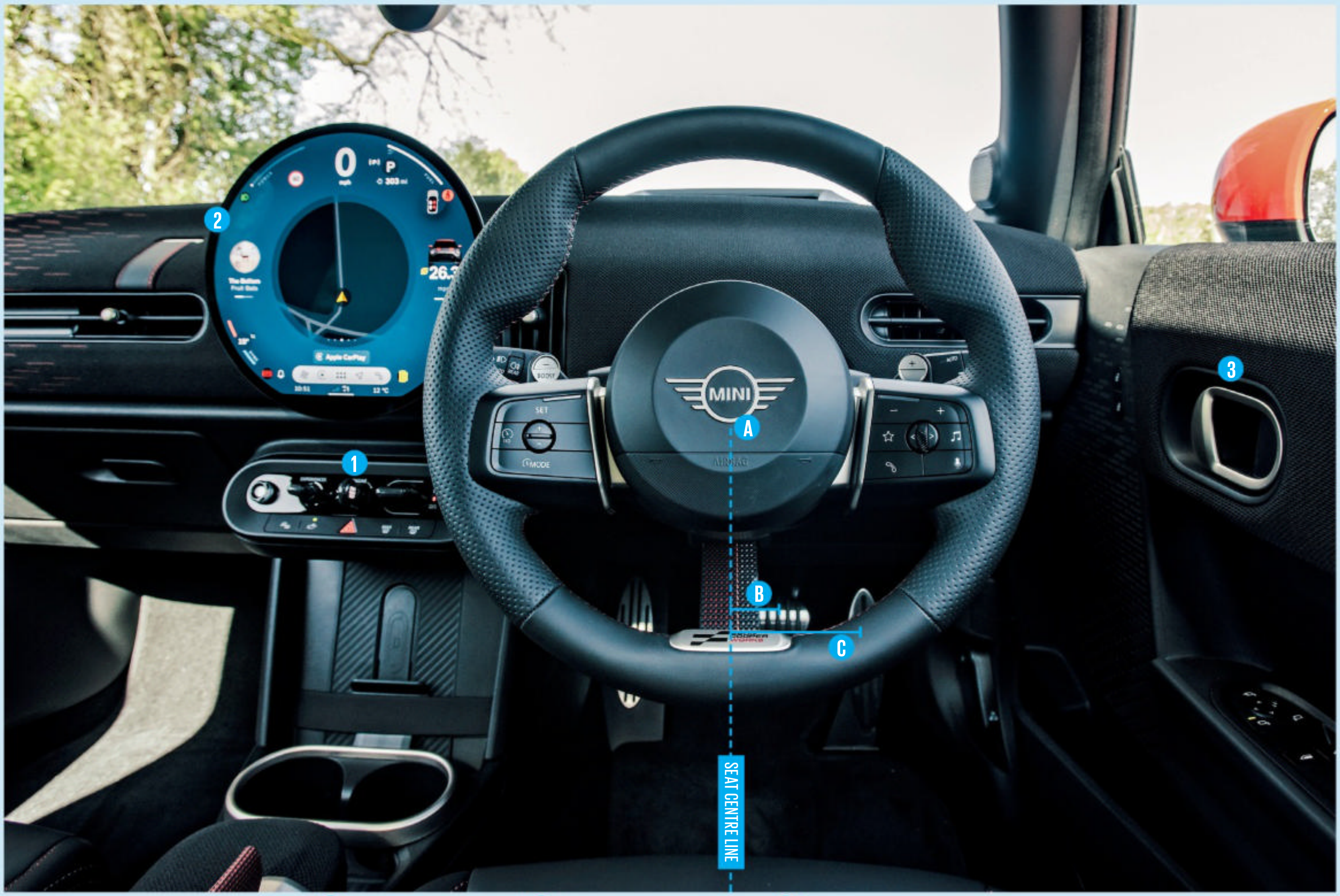
Since the latest Mini Countryman was launched in 2024, we have had some time to get used to Mini's current style and control layout, but they remain divisive. Purely as a design exercise, the simple dashboard with a large round touchscreen and a minimal button ▶

PHOTOGRAPHY JACK HARRISON

① Instead of pressing a start/stop button, you twist this fake ignition key. It's a neat touch, and it's flanked by the drive mode and gear selector toggles. Still short on physical controls.

② You can choose which three widgets are shown on the home screen. We found the nav, media and trip most useful. Unless you select Go-Kart mode, the top left shows a power meter.

③ Coarse-knitted material is appearing in all new Minis and even some BMWs. In an affordable-ish car like this, it's quite appealing. 'Brass' door release feels quite mechanical.



WHEEL AND PEDAL ALIGNMENT Ⓐ Steering offset 0mm Ⓑ Brake offset 65mm right Ⓒ Accelerator offset 200mm right. Mini gives a low, straight-legged driving position. Brake pedal bracket leaves space for a clutch pedal, and the centre console could accommodate a gearlever.

◂ panel is an inspired reinterpretation of the classic Mini's basic dashboard and central speedometer.

In a modern car, there are many more functions to control than in the 1950s original, however. Squeezing a speedometer, tachometer, climate controls, warning lights and shortcut buttons, as well as navigation, media and the trip computer, plus a few more things, onto the 9.4in screen in a way that makes all these functions easily accessible at all times proved beyond Mini's user interface designers.

The graphics certainly look characterful, unique to Mini and therefore quite attractive. And at least the climate temperature controls and heated seats buttons are permanently displayed. It's also possible to configure some shortcuts, but you're quite limited in which functions you can map to them, and you have to log in with a Mini ID for this functionality to be enabled. This feels like a slightly cynical way for BMW to coerce you into giving up your data.

What should be simple actions like adjusting the screen brightness and turning off the lane keeping assistance require too many taps of the screen. Apple CarPlay and Android Auto are inelegantly rendered in a rectangle on the round screen. Bafflingly for a petrol-engined hot hatch, it's frustratingly difficult to get the screen to display a tachometer with numbers on it.

Something that hasn't changed is the amount of space a three-door Mini offers. There just isn't very much rear leg room or boot space. With that said, it is more usable than you might expect. While the rear seats are hard to access, they actually offer slightly more knee room than the Renault 5, and head room is just about sufficient for shorter adults. Despite the two Isofix points, this is clearly not a family-oriented hatchback, like a Skoda Fabia, however. At 210 litres, the boot is downright small, though the variable-height floor adds a little usability at least.

PERFORMANCE

★★★★☆

PROS Very quick; good gearbox; sounds okay; short wet braking

CONS No manual option; rough start/stop; brake fade

If this is the end for the petrol-powered hot hatch, it is going out with a bang rather than a whimper. Squeezing 228bhp out of its 2.0-litre engine, the Mini JCW is seriously quick for a supermini hot hatch. Ignoring the mutant Toyota GR Yaris for a moment (which is sold out, and which operated in a different sphere anyway), the Mini easily out-drags the VW Polo GTI, and even the Hyundai i20 N, whether that's from a standing start or in gear.

In practice the gap is probably even bigger than on the test track because the Mini makes it so easy to go fast. Where the i20 N driver has to carefully balance the clutch and gas, and nail every shift, the Mini driver simply engages the launch control in the usual way, and lets rip.

The launch control allows quite a lot of wheelspin from a stop, but thereafter the JCW is very effective, its seven-speed dual-clutch rifling through the remarkably short gears: it gave just 7.9mph per 1000rpm in second and 12.7mph per 1000rpm in third (i20 N: 9.5mph, 13.5mph). It tops out at 51mph in second and 83mph in third.

Effective the automatic may be, but we can't help wishing for a six-speed manual. While the short gearing adds some texture to B-road blasts and the dual-clutch's operation is largely faultless (it does shift up at the redline in manual mode), we miss the engagement of getting more personally involved with a gearlever and three pedals.

Beggars can't be choosers, of course, and even in daily operation the automatic works well – much better, in fact, than in the standard Cooper S, where it was often recalcitrant and jerky.

BMW's 2.0-litre B48 four-cylinder is a familiar one, seeing service in everything from the 220i to the Morgan Plus Four. It's not the most charismatic unit, but it is smooth and very torquey, particularly in this state of tune. It needs all the sonic help it can get, though. With both a fruity exhaust and speaker-based trickery, it receives plenty in the JCW, but it all sounds realistic and subtle enough that it's not too hard to suspend your disbelief and just enjoy the drive.

It does without the mild-hybrid assistance it gets in various BMW models. While it's not lacking for low-down grunt, it does mean that you need to build turning off the start/stop into your pre-drive routine, if you don't want the engine conking at inopportune moments.

With no regen to interfere, the brake pedal feels perfectly natural, though the stopping distances in the dry are nothing remarkable for a performance car. There was even a bit of fade after six consecutive stops, and during our track session the pedal started to go slightly soft.

RIDE & HANDLING

★★★★☆

PROS Adjustable balance; grip and response; advanced stability control

CONS Stiff ride; no limited-slip diff

Going into this test we were somewhat worried, because the standard Cooper S is entertaining enough but the five-door we ran as a long-term test car was overly firm and crashy, with a propensity for popping its 18in tyres. You might expect the extra-sporty version to be even worse, but the opposite is true.

The JCW seems to dial things down slightly and take the crashy sting out of the ride. At motorway speeds, the long-wave ride seems to calm down a tad too, making it a more agreeable long-distance car.

Mind you, the JCW is still extremely stiffly sprung – excessively so for a bumpy British B-road, where the body control is very excitable indeed, stopping just short of the point where it gets deflected. There can be no good reason why it's this aggressive, and if you needed any more proof that Minis are no longer really UK-optimised cars but instead arts of dynamic pastiche, here it is.

At least the payoff is very immediate handling. At 2.4 turns lock to lock, the steering isn't overly direct but it's intuitively sped, and once you get past the slightly elastic feel, it does weight up in a way that tells you how much grip is available.

The front axle has plenty of bite to back that up. The additional camber of the JCW, in combination with the optional 'Sport' tyres (Continental SportContact 7), certainly banishes the languid front-end response cars on this platform sometimes have.

Like in most modern hot hatches, the differential is of the bog-standard open variety. For the majority of drivers, this is probably a good thing, because locking diffs can sometimes exacerbate torque steer. Despite putting 280lb ft through the front axle, that is almost entirely absent in the Mini. Traction out of tight corners is strong too, but we suspect that even when the traction and stability control are turned off, the electronics are still subtly reining the engine in to avoid overloading the front axle.

With the proper hardware, the JCW might find more resolute drive, and if that is at the expense of some polish, we dare say that would be worth it in the top-flight hot hatch.

All of which is not to speak ill of the traction and stability control: it's very quick-acting, mostly unintrusive, particularly in Sport Plus mode, and can be disabled completely (with the aforementioned caveat). Having this safety net has also allowed the engineers to tune the car's handling to be joyfully throttle-adjustable, since it will never be allowed to misbehave if you leave the systems on. Turn them off and this Mini can be made to take ludicrous angles of lift-off oversteer, particularly on a wet track. Meanwhile, on a dry road or track, it just feels alive, hyper-agile and up for anything. When it comes to front-wheel-drive balance, the JCW is right up there.

ASSISTED DRIVING

★★★★☆

PROS Smooth, well-calibrated systems; option of standard cruise control

CONS Adjusting essential functions is done in a sub-menu of the screen

BMW and Mini's assisted driving systems are generally well resolved, but the Mini's convoluted user interface makes configuring them quite frustrating. The overspeed warning can be disabled by holding a steering wheel button, but doing the same for the lane keep assist requires going into a touchscreen menu. Thankfully, it tends to keep to itself when you leave it on. The adaptive cruise control is also quite smooth and can be switched to standard cruise control. However, because there are no buttons on the steering wheel for adjusting the following distance, you need to fiddle with the touchscreen a lot.

BUYING & OWNING

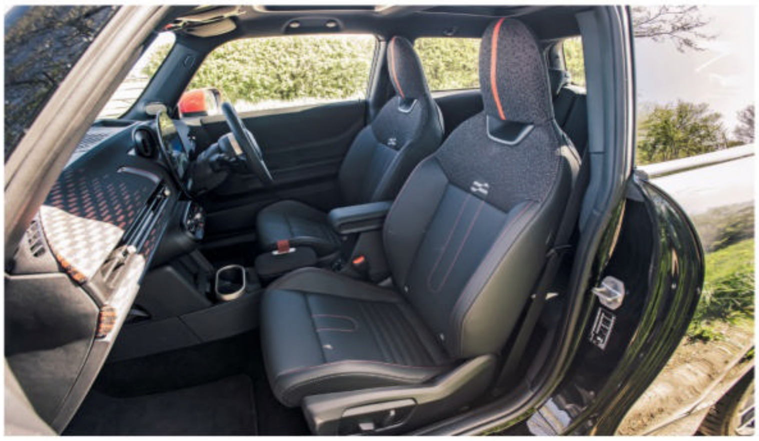
★★★⯪☆

PROS Well equipped; what else are you going to buy?

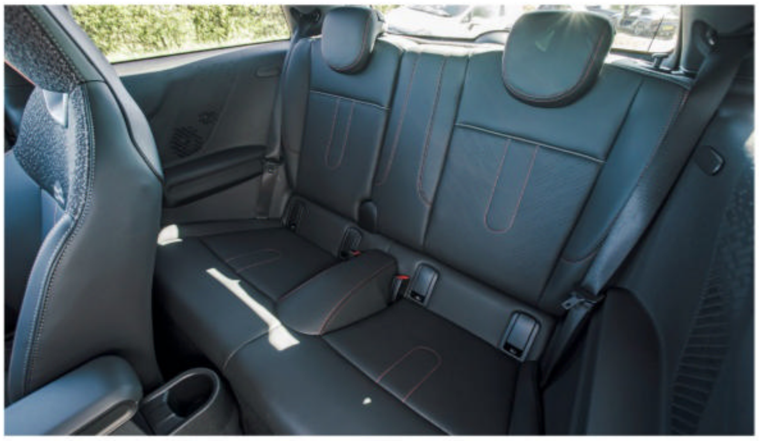
CONS Not cheap

Don't be too put off by our test car's £39,215 price. This is a classic press car with every option on it. The £33,265 standard JCW already has the Level 1 package, which includes matrix LED lights, keyless entry, heated seats, the head-up display and a wireless phone charger, with which we would be happy enough. Optional colours are sensibly priced at £550, and even the 18in wheels are a no-cost option.

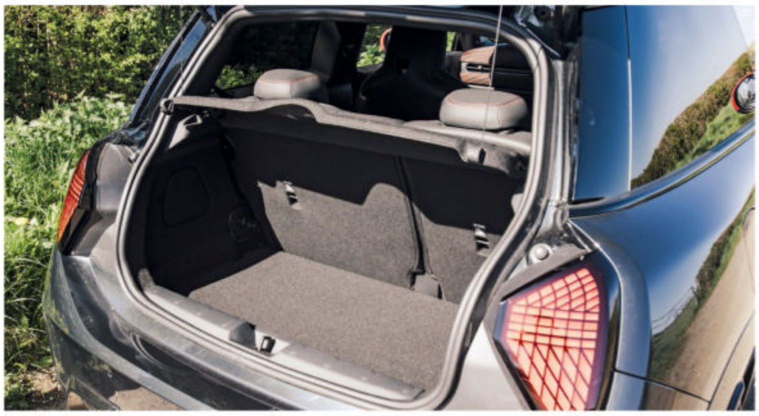
Fuel economy probably won't be at the top of your list of priorities if you're buying a hot hatch, because with a relatively big engine and no mild-hybrid assistance, the Mini JCW returns an unremarkable touring economy of 42.0mpg. The relatively small 44-litre fuel tank results in an equally middling cruising range. ▸



FRONT Leg room 1120mm, head room 970mm. Seats are mostly comfy but a touch flat. We expected a more aggressive bucket in the hot JCW version.



REAR Leg room 630mm, head room 900mm. Getting in is a struggle, but once you are, there's more room than in some small five-door hatchbacks.



BOOT Length 460-1170mm, width 965mm, height 440-710mm. It's a small space but there's a variable-height floor and the rear seats fold flat.

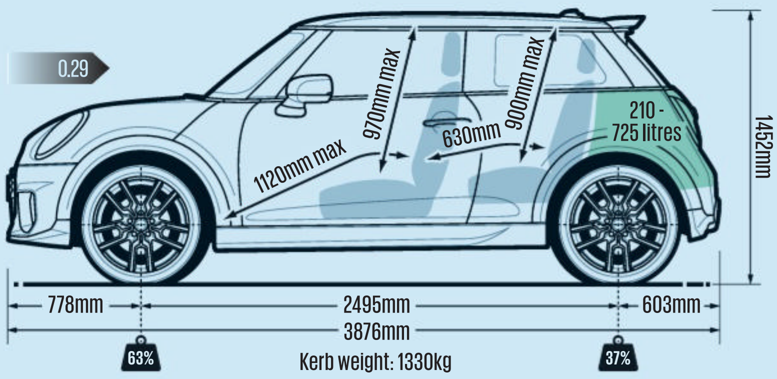
> "It just feels alive, hyper-agile and up for anything"

COOPER
YH25 RWO

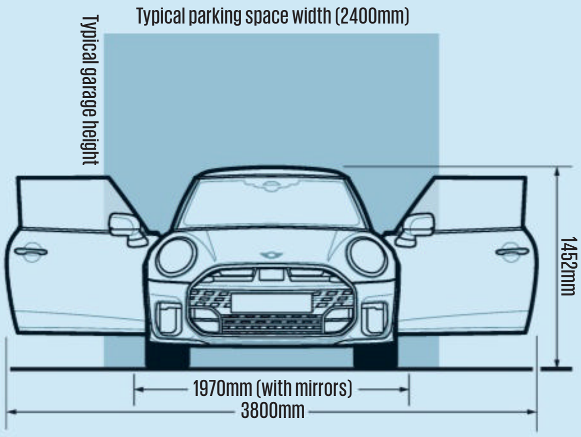
TEST RESULTS

DIMENSIONS

Length 3876mm **Width** 1970mm/1744mm (with/without mirrors)
Height 1452mm **Door span** 3800mm

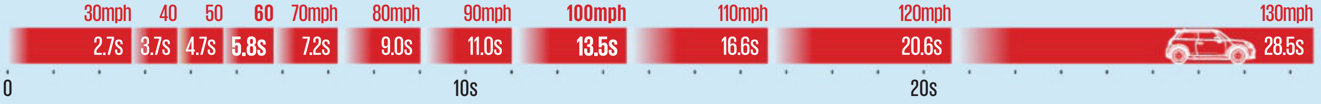

0.29
970mm max
900mm max
630mm
1120mm max
210 - 725 litres
1452mm
778mm
2495mm
603mm
3876mm
63%
Kerb weight: 1330kg
37%

PARKING

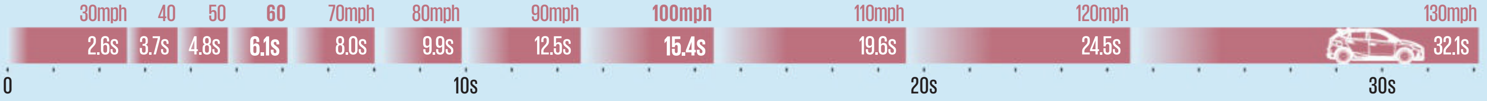

Typical parking space width (2400mm)
Typical garage height
1452mm
1970mm (with mirrors)
3800mm

ACCELERATION

Test conditions 17deg C, dry
Standing quarter mile 14.3sec at 102.9mph **Standing km** 25.6sec at 129.6mph **30-70mph** 4.5sec **30-70mph in fourth** 6.6sec **0-62mph** 6.1sec

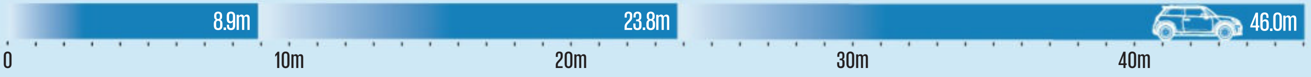


Hyundai i20 N (2021, 15deg C, dry)
Standing quarter mile 14.9sec at 98.0mph **Standing km** 26.8sec at 123.3mph **30-70mph** 5.4sec **30-70mph in fourth** 8.0sec

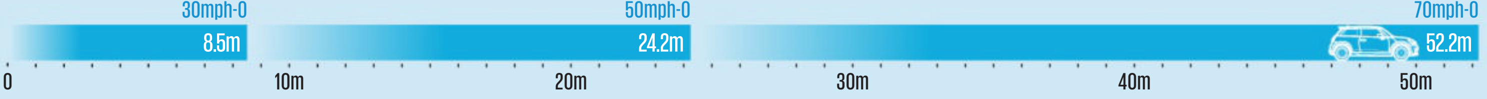


BRAKING

Dry 60-0mph 2.55sec



Wet 60-0mph 2.79sec

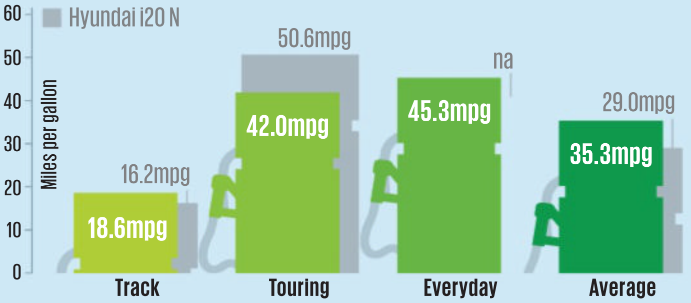


ACCELERATION IN GEAR

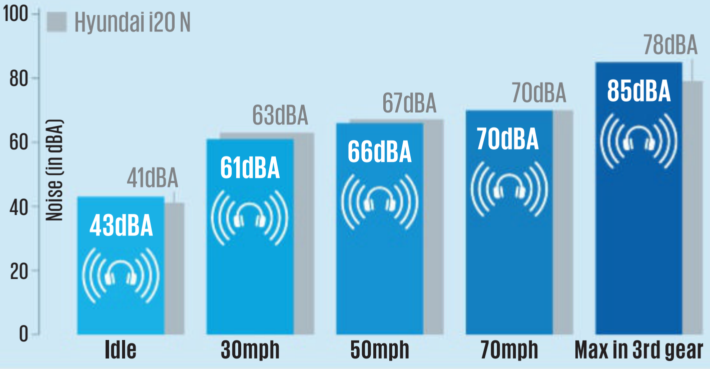
mph	Time (sec) 2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th
20-40	1.7	2.4	5.8			
30-50	1.9	2.2	3.4	4.9		
40-60		2.2	3.2	4.3	5.7	
50-70		2.5	3.2	4.2	5.4	7.1
60-80		3.2	3.4	4.3	5.8	7.5
70-90			3.8	4.5	6.3	8.3
80-100			4.6	4.9	6.9	9.4
90-110			5.8	5.8	7.6	11.0
100-120				7.4		
110-130						

RUNNING EFFICIENCY

WLTP 41.5mpg (combined) **Test range** 342/407/438 miles (average/touring/everyday)

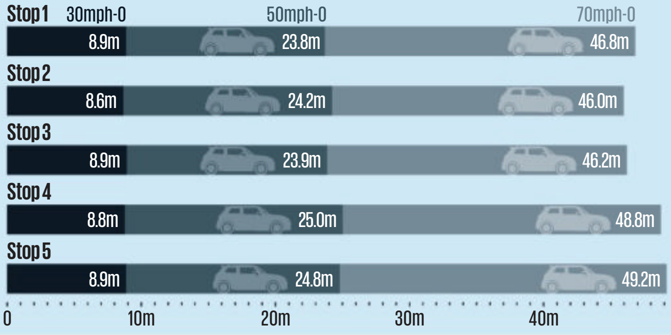


CABIN NOISE



BRAKING ENDURANCE

Fade variance 70-0m – stop 1 vs stop 5: 2.4m



PETER LIDDIARD

THE SMALL PRINT Power-to-weight and torque-to-weight figures are calculated using manufacturer's claimed kerb weight. Running efficiency is tested on a closed test track; 'touring' is representative of UK motorway driving, 'everyday' of intra-urban driving. Acceleration, braking and cabin noise are measured on reference surfaces, for cabin noise using a handheld decibel meter. Charging equipment may vary, but charger power always exceeds the advertised peak draw of the test car. Second-row leg room is typical, measured behind a driver's seat set for 1000mm of leg room. © 2025, Haymarket Media Group Ltd. Test results may not be reproduced without editor's written permission.

VERDICT

A proper hot hatch, let down by ride and user interface

★★★★☆

Is well over £30,000 too much for a junior hot hatch? To a point, Mini can charge whatever it likes, because there aren't many alternatives. The Mazda MX-5 isn't very practical and the Alpine A290 is electric – both great options, but different.

Together with the more safe and steady VW Polo GTI, the Mini JCW is the last trad hot hatch standing, and that earns it a fair amount of latitude, in terms of its pricing, as well as its strengths and weaknesses. It is by no means perfect: no manual gearbox, firm ride, overcomplicated user interface.

But it has the design charm we've come to expect of a Mini and it possesses the performance and handling talent to entertain. The way it can be enjoyed on road, on track or to the supermarket makes it a proper hot hatch. If you're after a compact driver's car, it demands consideration.

TESTERS' NOTES

ILLYA VERPRAET
The option of 'performance tyres' on the 18in wheels sounds appealing, until you realise that for less than the £800 that they cost, you could just stick with the 17s and swap the standard tyres for something sportier after the fact, and retain some ride comfort with the smaller wheels.

MATT SAUNDERS
The JCW gets a head-up display as standard, but it's one of those pop-up screens, which begs the question: why not just give us a proper instrument cluster that shows your speed and revs?

FACELIFT FIXES

- Give the six-speed manual a last hurrah.
- Fit some more serious sports seats.
- Take a long, hard look at the mess of a screen interface and revise it.

MANUFACTURER'S SPECIFICATION

MINI JOHN COOPER WORKS

On-the-road price £33,265
Price as tested £39,215
Value after 3yrs/36k miles £19,625
Contract hire £563 pcm (£3000 deposit + 36 months/30,000 miles)
Typical PCP £504 pcm (£5880 deposit + 36 months/30,000 miles, £19,517 final payment)
Insurance group 27E

FITTED EQUIPMENT

Standard Matrix LED headlights, keyless entry, heated seats, head-up display
Optional Legend Grey paint £550, 18in wheels with Sport tyres £800, Level 3 pack £4600

ENGINE

Installation Front, transverse, FWD
Type 4 cyls in line, 1998cc, turbocharged, petrol
Power 228bhp at 5000-6000rpm
Torque 280lb ft at 1500-4000rpm
Redline 6500rpm
Specific output 114bhp per litre
Power to weight 171bhp per tonne
Torque to weight 211lb ft per tonne

GEARBOX

Type 7-spd dual-clutch automatic
Ratios/mph per 1000rpm
1st 15.87/4.6 **2nd** 9.31/7.9 **3rd** 5.79/12.7 **4th** 3.97/18.6 **5th** 3.15/23.4 **6th** 2.48/29.7 **7th** 2.02/36.6
rpm in top gear at 70/80mph 1915/2188

CHASSIS & BODY

Construction Steel monocoque
Weight/as tested 1330kg/1363kg
Weight distribution (f/r) 63%/37%
Drag coefficient 0.29
Wheels 7.0Jx18in
Tyres 215/40 R18 89Y XL P ★, Continental SportContact 7
Spare None
Fuel tank 44 litres (under rear seats, filler on nearside rear wing)

SUSPENSION & STEERING

Front MacPherson struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar **Rear** Multi-link, coil springs, anti-roll bar
Steering EPAS rack and pinion; 2.4 turns lock to lock; 11.1m turning circle

BRAKES

Front 335mm ventilated discs, single-piston calipers
Rear 280mm ventilated discs, single-piston calipers
Handbrake type Electronic, automatic

SAFETY

Euro NCAP rating Not tested

EMISSIONS & TAX

CO₂ 154g/km
BIK at 20/40% pcm £233/£466

RANKING RIVALS

	1	2	3	4	5	6
				MINI JOHN COOPER WORKS		
	MAZDA MX-5 2.0 HOMURA	**ALPINE A290 PERFORMANCE**	**TOYOTA GR YARIS**		**VOLKSWAGEN POLO GTI**	**FORD PUMA ST**
	If you want a small, entertaining car with a petrol engine, this is unbeatable. Not very practical, though.	Electric take on the hot hatch shows the future for the genre. An EV will work for you, or not.	Brilliant, unique, expensive – and sold out. You might still find the odd delivery-mileage car with a price mark-up.		A hot hatch more in name than in nature. Has alternative appeal as a small car with a bit of poke.	Facelift has neutered the Puma ST with less power and a lazy auto 'box. The chassis is still good, though.
	★★★★★	★★★★½	★★★★½		★★★½☆	★★★½☆
Price	£35,515	£36,000	£42,545		£30,740	£33,880
Power, torque	181bhp, 151lb ft	217bhp, 221lb ft	276bhp, 288lb ft		204bhp, 236lb ft	168bhp, 183lb ft
0-62mph, top speed	6.5sec, 136mph	6.4sec, 105mph	5.2sec, 143mph		6.5sec, 150mph	7.4sec, 124mph
CO_2, economy	153g/km, 41.5mpg	0g/km, 3.7mpkWh	197g/km, 32.5mpg		148g/km, 43.4mpg	135g/km, 47.0mpg

AUTOCAR **ROAD TEST 5748**

AUDI Q5

Mid-sized SUV packs a rare powertrain: diesel hybrid. Does it stack up?

It can seem like cars are getting homogenised, with a new skateboard-platform EV being launched every other week. But a few intrepid engineers are still toying with concepts that their colleagues have long since abandoned. Mazda has brought back the rotary engine, Suzuki has revived the automated manual gearbox and Audi is betting on the diesel hybrid with cars like the Q5.

Following the related A5 saloon and estate replacing the old A4, the Q5 enters a third generation. Going up against the BMW X3, Mercedes GLC and Range Rover Velar, it's an incredibly important car for Audi, because while EV quotas make the Q6 E-tron the one that Audi needs to push, the combustion-engined mid-size premium SUV is still the car that customers want.

To make the piston-powered Q5 a bit more palatable to the regulators, every version is a hybrid with the capacity to drive with a dormant engine. Plug-in hybrids will follow later this year, but the Q5 arrives with a four-cylinder petrol, a four-pot diesel and, in the SQ5, a V6 petrol. Here, we're testing the diesel.

DESIGN & ENGINEERING

★★★★☆

PROS Clever hybrid tech; powertrain, suspension and bodystyle options

CONS No PHEVs yet; 2.1-tonne mass

An electrified diesel engine feels like an odd mix of past and future technology, like a trebuchet with a touchscreen, but we found Audi's MHEV Plus system to work quite well on the V6 petrol S5, so there is definitely an appeal in applying the same to a diesel engine to create something that's potentially extremely economical.

MHEV, or mild hybrid, is a misnomer, because the system employs both a normal mild-hybrid-style starter-generator and a 24bhp, 170lb ft motor mounted to the seven-speed dual-clutch gearbox to provide torque fill and drive the car independently under low accelerator inputs.

Like the A5 and A6 saloons and estates, the Q5 sits on the Volkswagen Group's Premium Platform Combustion. PPC allows for Audi's typical drivetrain layout of a longitudinal engine that sits relatively far forwards so that it can drive the front wheels only in lower-end versions. In the UK, every version of the Q5 gets what Audi calls Quattro Ultra: four-wheel drive using a wet multi-plate clutch.

Audi engineers say that having the engine further forwards than in a BMW X3, Mercedes GLC or Mazda CX-60 creates more interior room and is important for keeping weight over the front wheels of front-wheel-drive variants.

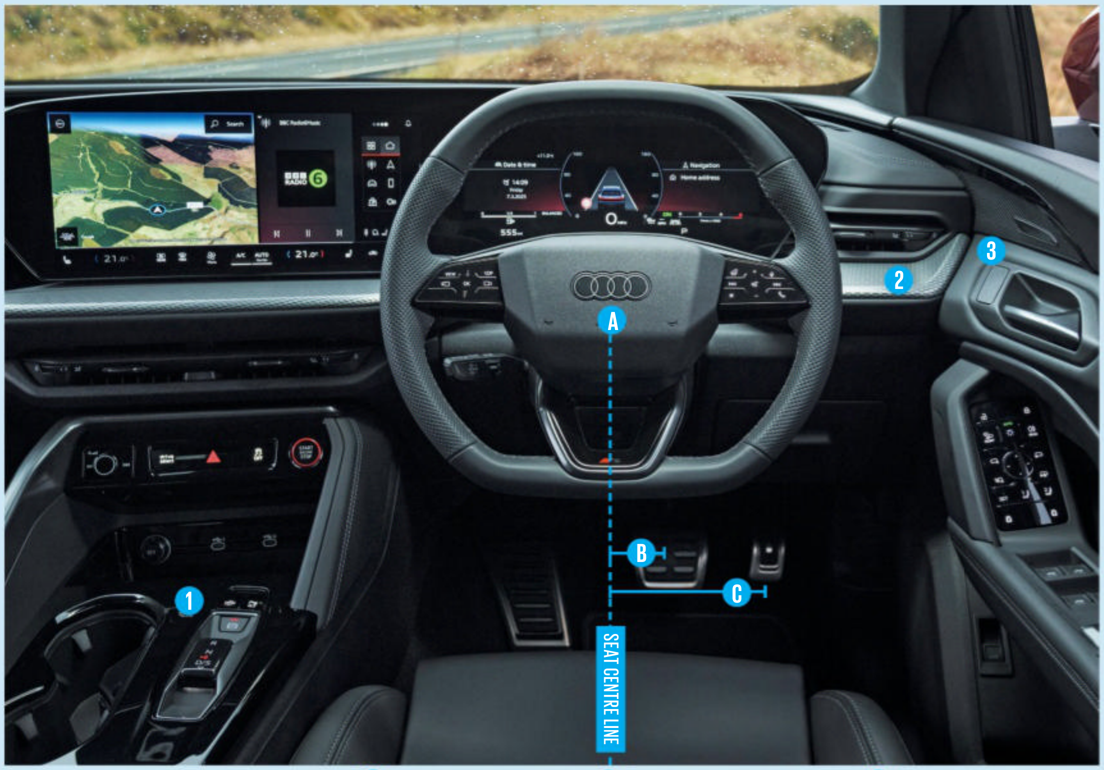
As with the A5, the Q5 comes as standard on steel coil springs with

MODEL TESTED
AUDI Q5 TDI QUATTRO 204PS S LINE
Price £55,660
Power 201bhp at 3800-4200rpm
Torque 295lb ft at 1750-3250rpm
0-60mph 6.7sec
30-70mph 7.1sec
Top speed 140mph (claimed)
Average economy 35.8mpg
CO₂ emissions 170g/km
70-0mph 46.9m (15deg C, dry)

① Gloss black plastic centre console does not feel appropriate in a £50,000 car. At least it houses a few physical controls, such as for the drive mode, ADAS and ESC.

② This piece of trim can be wood, aluminium or carbonfibre on LHD cars, but in the UK it's always a kind of textured plastic. Still, it lends a bit of visual interest to the dashboard.

③ It's strange for a car with so few physical buttons to have blank switches. On North American versions, these are for the door lock/unlock.



WHEEL AND PEDAL ALIGNMENT Ⓐ Steering offset 0mm Ⓑ Brake offset 70mm right Ⓒ Accelerator offset 200mm right. Brake pedal sits 50mm higher than the accelerator, requiring you to lift your right foot quite far.

passive dampers in two flavours: softer on Sport trim and firmer on S Line and Edition 1 trims. However, on the Q5, it's possible to replace the standard set-up with adaptive air suspension for £1725, albeit only on S Line and Edition 1 trims.

As before, the Q5 is available as a standard SUV or as a Sportback with a sloping roof for £2500 more.

INTERIOR

★★★☆☆

PROS Driving position and seat comfort; boot and seat flexibility; ease of use; slick infotainment
CONS Over-reliance on screens; material quality; not overly spacious; limited added value of passenger screen

If you've read our recent road tests of the Q6 E-tron, S5 or S6 E-tron, you'll know that Audi appears intent on sharing as many interior parts as possible across its latest models. While it might argue this ensures coherence across models, it whiffs slightly of penny-pinching.

Certainly, the new Q5's interior design takes a 90deg left turn from its predecessor. Gone are the brushed aluminium surfaces and tactile buttons, to be replaced with a pair of screens and rather too much scratch- and fingerprint-prone gloss black plastic. It feels like a step up from the A5 thanks to a few more appealing materials, but a step down in quality from the old Q5.

Rivals like the X3, GLC and Velar have had similar downgrades in recent years, so the Q5 doesn't fall short of the current class standard. Even so, more traditional buyers who feel left behind by this generation of premium SUVs will feel more at home in the CX-60, which blows the 'premium' brands out of the water for tactility and material appeal. The Lexus NX is a good alternative too.

Compared with the X3 and the Velar, the Q5 also scores with its ease of use. Most controls may be via the touchscreen, but you can adjust the temperature, switch on the heated seats or change the drive mode with just one press.

Audi's latest, Android-based MMI infotainment system is slick and easy to use. The home screen contains tiles for the navigation, the media and a bank of shortcuts. The interface is generally logical and quick to respond.

The passenger screen, which features on Edition 1 cars, can control the navigation and media, as well as third-party apps like YouTube. Q5s without it get a big slab of gloss black plastic instead.

The seats can give you a relatively saloon-like driving position or a taller one, as you wish, and are widely adjustable and supportive, making the Q5 a very agreeable long-distance companion.

In the rear, meanwhile, leg room is on the stingier end of the class. An adult can sit behind another but can't stretch out particularly. The rear bench slides and reclines in a 60/40 split, and there are two USB ports, climate vents and – on some trims – heated seats.

At 520 litres, the boot is bigger than the CX-60's but smaller than in the X3 and GLC. There is a decent-size compartment under the floor that will swallow the luggage cover if needed. If you've specced the air suspension, there's also a button that lets the car sit down on its springs for easier loading.

PERFORMANCE

★★★★⯪

PROS Smooth, effortless and quiet
CONS More powerful hybrid system could allow for more EV running ▶

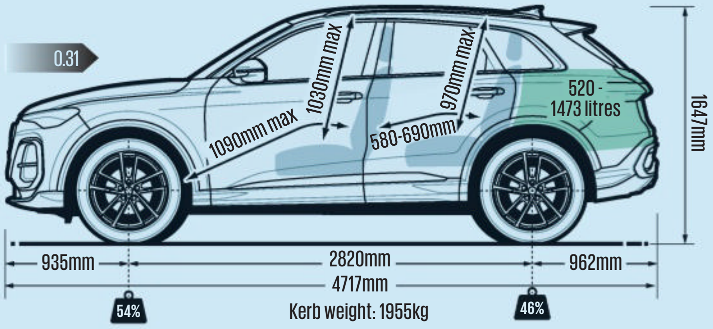
■ You can tell which Q5 you're looking at by the exhaust tips. The diesel has these double square ones; the petrol has twin trapezoid tips; and the SQ5 has quad oval exhausts.

■ Like other Audis on the PPC platform, the Q5 retains a longitudinal engine ahead of the front axle. The 24bhp electric motor is mounted on the dual-clutch gearbox.

TEST RESULTS

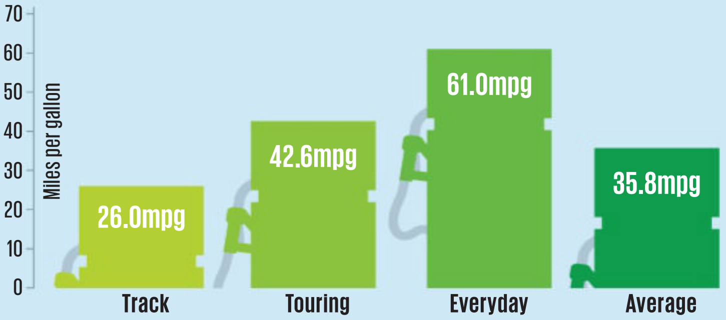
DIMENSIONS

Length 4717mm **Width** 2155mm/1900mm (with/without mirrors) **Height** 1647mm **Door span** 3560mm **Max height to open bootlid** 2100mm



RUNNING EFFICIENCY

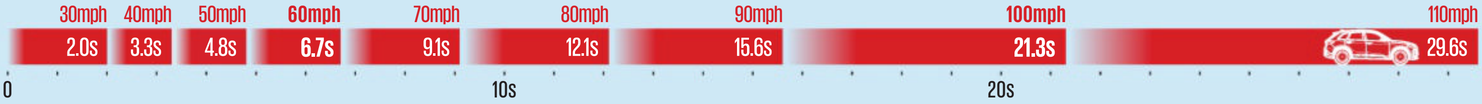
WLTP 37.7mpg (combined) **Test range** 512/609/872 miles (average/touring/everyday)



ACCELERATION

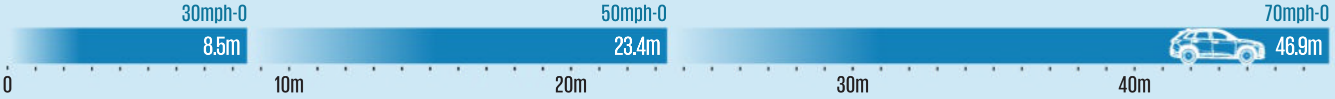
Test conditions 15deg C, dry

Standing quarter mile 15.2sec at 89mph **Standing km** 28.6sec at 108.9mph **30-70mph** 7.1sec **30-70mph in fourth** 7.5sec **0-62mph** 7.1sec

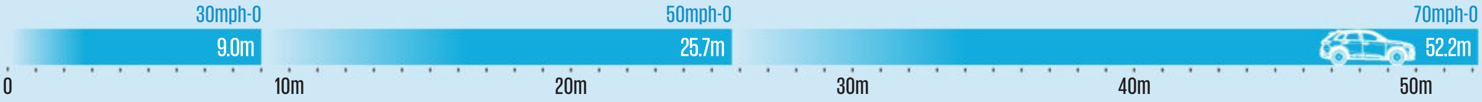


BRAKING

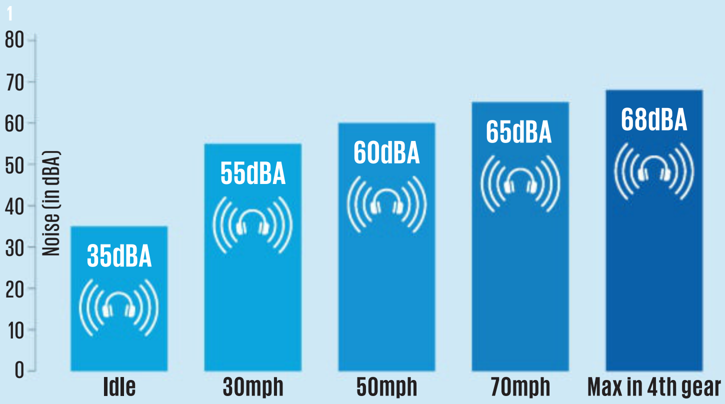
Dry 60-0mph 2.50sec



Wet 60-0mph 2.74sec



CABIN NOISE



MANUFACTURER'S SPECIFICATION

AUDI Q5 TDI QUATTRO 204PS S LINE

On-the-road price £55,660
Price as tested £63,130
Value after 3yrs/36k miles £34,000
Insurance group 40E

HYBRID POWERTRAIN

Engine Front, longitudinal, 4WD **Type** 4 cyls in line, 1968cc, turbo, diesel; 201bhp, 295lb ft **Motor** PMSM, gearbox-mounted; 24bhp, 170lb ft **Battery** 1.7kWh (usable), LFP **Total power/torque** 201bhp/295lb ft **Power to weight** 103bhp per tonne **Torque to weight** 151lb ft per tonne

GEARBOX

Type 7-spd dual-clutch automatic **rpm in 7th at 70/80mph** 1861/2127

CHASSIS & BODY

Construction Steel/aluminium monocoque **Weight/as tested** 1955kg/2072kg **Wheels** 8.0Jx20in **Tyres** 245/45 R20 105W, Michelin Pilot Sport 4 SUV A01 **Fuel tank** 65 litres (under rear seats, filler on offside rear wing)

SUSPENSION, STEERING & BRAKES

Front/rear Multi-link, anti-roll bar, air springs with adaptive dampers **Steering** EPAS, rack and pinion; 2.2 turns lock to lock; 11.9m turning circle **Brakes** 360mm ventilated discs (f), 330mm ventilated discs (r)

"It offers a pleasing balance of ride, handling and refinement"

PETER LIDDIARD

THE SMALL PRINT Power-to-weight and torque-to-weight figures are calculated using manufacturer's claimed kerb weight. Running efficiency is tested on a closed test track; 'touring' is representative of UK motorway driving, 'everyday' of intra-urban driving. Acceleration, braking and cabin noise are measured on reference surfaces, for cabin noise using a handheld decibel meter. Charging equipment may vary, but charger power always exceeds the advertised peak draw of the test car. Second-row leg room is typical, measured behind a driver's seat set for 1000mm of leg room. © 2025, Haymarket Media Group Ltd. Test results may not be reproduced without editor's written permission.

◂ Diesel engines may have become unfashionable, but it's easy to see why they used to be ubiquitous in larger, heavier cars. A modern diesel engine that's smooth and quiet gives a car like the Q5 an effortless turn of pace.

Sure, it's possible to detect a bit of diesel clatter at some revs, particularly when the oil isn't yet up to operating temperature, but most of the time the 2.0 TDI fades into the background. That's never truer than in town, when the engine can very often shut down and leave the electric motor to handle propulsion.

Despite a power-to-weight ratio no higher than rivals', the new Q5 is faster to 60mph than the 197bhp CX-60 diesel and the hybrid NX 350h. It's only a few tenths shy of the more powerful petrol GLC 300 but, more significantly, it's a whole second quicker from 30-70mph in fourth gear than the GLC. The low-rpm boost from the electric motor must play a big role here.

While we detected some lapses in refinement when we tested the S5 with this hybrid system, the handover between electric and piston power was never less than perfectly smooth in the diesel Q5.

The hybrid system also has a considerable influence on the Q5's braking. Because there is 25kW of regeneration available, Audi chose to use a brake-by-wire set-up that removes any transition between regen and friction brakes. The pedal feels perhaps a little dead but is firm and consistent. Braking performance is good, with no notable fade in the dry and a stopping distance in the wet that isn't much longer, despite the fitment of relatively wide, performance-oriented Michelin Pilot Sport 4 SUV tyres.

RIDE & HANDLING

★★★★☆

PROS Intuitive and composed handling; settled ride; quiet at speed; ADAS

CONS Slightly characterless; air suspension is expensive; acoustic glass is reserved for the top trim

Audi has gained a dynamic streak with its recent cars and the Q5 is no different. Of course, it isn't focused on being a driver's car like the meaner, lower S5 is, but on the optional air suspension at least, the Q5 offers quite a pleasing balance of ride, handling and refinement.

On first acquaintance, the variable-ratio steering is perhaps a little too quick around the dead-ahead, but this is something you get used to within a few miles. Thereafter, it's nicely measured, subtly weighted and with a bit of feedback coming through when you load up the chassis.

Despite the nose-heavy weight distribution, it turns in keenly and powers out of corners with perfect traction on anything other than icy roads. Without the SQ5's rear sport differential and more aggressive four-wheel drive, the standard Q5 doesn't have a particular sense of rear bias: it's simply very poised.

We've yet to try a Q5 on coil springs, since Audi's initial production run has been of high-spec cars only. Audi's philosophy towards tuning air suspension is rather different from that of Mercedes or Range Rover, favouring a more connected feel over magic-carpet-style waftiness. It always lets you know what's going on underneath the wheels but whispers rather than shouts it at you. That said, there is very little difference between the Comfort and Balanced settings, which feels like a missed opportunity not to offer that wafty feeling for those drivers who want it.

On the 20in wheels of our test car, short imperfections are dealt with very adeptly too. It feels well damped, with little of the brittleness of some air suspension set-ups. Acoustic refinement is impressive too, with the Q5 proving quieter at 70mph than all the rivals we've tested.

As with most recent VW Group products, the ADAS functions are quite well resolved, with smooth adaptive cruise control and lane following, well-calibrated AEB and driver monitoring, and a relatively easy route to switching off the lane keep assist and overspeed warning, both of which are far from infallible.

BUYING & OWNING

★★★½☆

PROS Competitive price; economical in town

CONS Lacklustre economy at speed

The price-setters for the premium brands always have an eagle eye on the competition, so prices for the Q5 are very similar to those for like-for-like versions of the X3, GLC and NX. A CX-60 is quite a bit cheaper, while a Velar is significantly dearer. This is true if you're looking at outright purchase or monthly prices.

Where the Q5 disappoints is with its fuel consumption. For all its clever hybrid technology, the Q5 couldn't match the touring or average economy we recorded in any of its diesel or hybrid rivals. Because it was able to shut down its engine a lot on our everyday economy test, it achieved an impressive 61mpg, so drivers who cover a lot of urban miles might find the Q5 very economical, but then they're probably unlikely to choose a diesel anyway. **A**

VERDICT

Pleasant and competitive, but no particular step forward

★★★½☆

In some ways, the new Q5 isn't all it's cracked up to be. If the purpose of the hybrid system was to make a diesel attractive again with unbeatable fuel economy, it seems a failure, doing more for performance than economy. The Q5 also loses the beautifully made interior of its predecessor.

Then again, it combines strong performance, a good balance of ride and handling, and intuitive tech features. Relative to the class standard, the Q5 remains quite recommendable, though we can't help concluding that the class standard has slipped somewhat.

RIVALS

MERCEDES-BENZ GLC 220D
From £54,450
★★★½☆

MAZDA CX-60 3.3D 4WD
From £49,350
★★★½☆

3 **AUDI Q5**

LEXUS NX 350H AWD
From £45,845
★★★½☆

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MATT SAUNDERS

Testing, testing

The C-X75 was epic to drive, but Jaguar decided not to launch it

The difference between a concept car and a prototype is huge. It's the difference between a piece of motor show eye candy and a viable proposition that has been made convincing enough to actually prove said concept.

This is the continuation of a thread I started in the 16 April issue, explaining the peculiarities, pressures and, often, disappointments that are associated with test drives in concept cars.

When you drive a concept car, you feel like a significant chunk of the story you write is about the art of the imagined. If this thing comes to be, just what might it be like? Such a car could supply perhaps 30-40% of that picture – or just 4%. But a prototype might get 90% of the way there.

There's a greater sense of occasion to driving a prototype; manufacturers usually only allow it when they're building up to introducing something really important. At this stage, a whole lot more has already been invested and more still is on the line. You might be driving one of only two or three very valuable examples of something currently in existence.

At the time, few realised quite how portentous Tesla's Roadster was

> “Occasionally, a test drive in a prototype is all you will ever get”

Sometimes, the full significance of what you're doing isn't apparent at the time. Back in the autumn of 2006, I went to Hethel, Norfolk, to ride in, rather than drive, a prototype of something called a Tesla. The Roadster was, of course, a stretched Lotus Elise with so many laptop batteries where the four-cylinder engine would otherwise have been. I remember still how uncannily responsive and linear the performance felt – and that was while the car still had a two-speed automatic gearbox, so it tended to shift at about 60mph in a way that was noticeable enough to, well, lunch gearboxes, it would later turn out.

Did it feel like the start of something that would change the car industry? Not entirely. But it was clearly a more credible product than anyone with whom I spoke about it at the time was ready to believe. I wouldn't have known that much from a show car.

There are prototype drives, by contrast, when you know precisely what strategic significance you're dealing with. Little can give you a better idea of that than turning up at the gates of a brand-new factory built to manufacture the car you're about to sample, a model that is being hailed as the saviour of its long-ailing creator. That's how I first sampled an Aston Martin DBX: with a car load of engineers along for the ride through the Welsh mountains. (“What do you think, Matt?” No pressure, there, then…)

And, just occasionally, you know that a test drive in a prototype is all you're ever going to get. That is exactly how it was with Jaguar's great aborted hybrid hypercar, the C-X75, when we managed a handful of laps of JLR's Gaydon high-speed and handling circuits in 2013.

This was the time of the hypercar ‘holy trinity’. Jaguar had been bold enough to invest big and, with the help of Williams Advanced Engineering, take its particular vision for such a car all the way through to a highly polished place. But, rather crushingly, it had also already decided not to build it. That competitors from Porsche, Ferrari and McLaren were all coming to market at the same time was too great a risk. Above all, JLR couldn't afford another XJ220.

The car certainly didn't deserve description in those terms. I never drove a LaFerrari, but I have driven both a McLaren P1 and a Porsche 918 Spyder, and honestly, the C-X75 was right up there. It had bucketloads of star quality; its chassis and steering were outstanding; and its 1.6-litre, 10,000rpm twin-charged four-cylinder combustion engine topped the lot. It was like some mutant superbike motor backed by epic electric torque fill. It was monumental.

The C-X75 might well be the greatest performance car that the British industry never made. And being in the position to learn that – however bittersweet it may feel on reflection – is why you don't turn down drives in prototypes.

One man went to tow...

Aussie luxury trailer specialist Bruder has cornered the market in off-road, off-grid living. **MATT PRIOR** heads into the wilderness

PHOTOGRAPHY MAX EDLESTON

7.393m The longest van in Bruder's regular range, the EXP-10 (it costs over £200k)

Oh what a beautiful awning: EXP-7 has two electric canopies

The information I'm sent before I collect the Bruder EXP-7 (I feel a little strange calling it a caravan, but we'll come back to that) contains some surprises. There's no bedding or kitchenware inside, I'm told, but there is a washer-dryer.

Now, I went caravanning when I was a kid, and I can still remember the noise of the pump when we had to pedal a lever repeatedly to draw water to the tap. People with water containers that were round barrels so they could be rolled rather than carried across the campsite were positively flash gits. But now I'm going to try a caravan with a washing machine? Swoon.

I'm sure things have moved on a bit in the conventional caravan world, but even by today's standards the Bruder EXP-7 is a bit special. It's from an Australian company founded by two brothers – hence the Bruder logo with kangaroos as umlauts – who grew up camping and being driven around the outback, and who kind of haven't stopped.

They would go to places that would quickly leave a conventional caravan looking like it had been used in one of those novelty banger races, so what they make, it says here, are described as "luxury off-road expedition trailers". Sometimes companies over-egg a description, but maybe not this lot, I think, as I have a nose around the EXP-7 outside Bentley's Crewe factory.

There's no official tie-in with Bentley, by the way. The people there just thought the Bruder was quite the thing, and I think they're keen to remind people that the Bentayga is a properly accomplished tow car and off-roader.

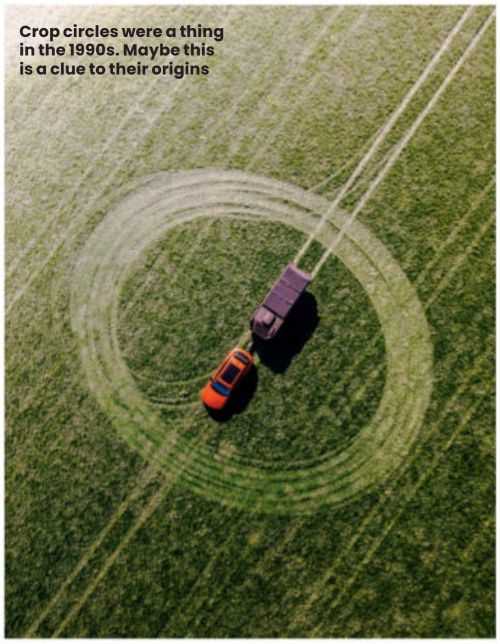
There is a perception sometimes that luxury is about five-star hotels and restaurants you can't get into. I'm not sure that's the only case: luxury, for me, is naffing off from all of that, being in a wide open space, on your own terms, in your own time, where the office can't find you and you can't get social media FOMO because there's no phone reception. There's a reason some Bentleys have a rotating dashboard that can hide away the infotainment. It's unusual these days to find that nobody knows where you are.

It is not only unusual but also quite difficult in and around Cheshire, I grant you, but we'll do what we can; Bruder models usually go a bit farther than this. There are five trailers in the basic line-up, but then you can get creative and ask them to do bespoke luxury designs or, if you're a commercial user, something more utilitarian. They're all expensive: the cheapest is around £75k, but depending on exchange rates this one is about £190,000 after taxes. But the military, mobile laboratory operators and royal families are all Bruder customers, and all for very different reasons.

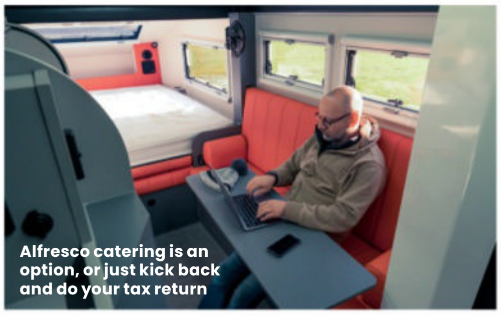
Then there are chumps like us, out for some giggles and very quickly realising that I'm not likely to exhaust the capability of the EXP-7. You just have to take a look underneath it: instead of a lightweight aluminium chassis so it can be towed by a Ford Focus, there is huge, beefy, sealed box-section tubing generously welded and clearly visible under the wheel arches, where individual trailing arms suspend each of the four wheels, which have 12in of travel and use a double-damped and air-sprung configuration that can withstand five times the weight of the trailer.

There's a composite body on top, 5.76m long, and the whole caboodle from nose to stern is 7.0m. It weighs 2700kg, so a couple of hundred more kilos than the Bentayga – if you were going exploring, convention dictates you'd load more into the car than the van. I'm not sure a duvet and a packet of risotto rice is going to make a huge difference, but I load it in the Bentley along with photographer Max Edleston in the passenger seat. And off we go exploring.

I'm glad I've got the shopping in already, because I'm not sure I fancy my chances of finding space outside Waitrose in Nantwich. Together this set-up is comfortably over 12m long, and while sometimes in a car I'll say "oh, you wouldn't know the trailer was there", that is not a position I find myself in with the Bruder. ▸



Crop circles were a thing in the 1990s. Maybe this is a clue to their origins



Alfresco catering is an option, or just kick back and do your tax return

I've never towed anything quite this blocky before. I've pulled horse trailers, but they've been shorter, I think, and car trailers, but they've been lighter and lower. The EXP-7's bulk never quite leaves you. That it's finished in what appears to be skateboard grip tape, absorbing light as it goes, doesn't help. It's intimidating, like being chased by one of the four horsemen, this big black indeterminate void occupying every mirror. It would look like we were off to launch missiles at a neighbouring state, were it not for the satin-orange Bentley doing the towing.

It's not that it's too unwieldy; at 1.9m wide it's no wider than the Bentley, which itself has a good turning circle. But you might note that on the roof it has solar panels, and they charge 10kWh worth of lithium ion batteries, and there's an on-board compressor for the air springing, and I suspect it's those as much as the chassis (and washing machine) that contribute to the weight. The whole caboodle is stable, but even with the Bentley's tyres pumped up a bit and the dampers in their firm mode, on really bumpy roads the trailer reminds you its there by gently shaking hands with the towbar.

By and by we get to some fields chosen for the occasion. Some up and some down, but none challenging the capability of the Bruder. The Bentayga runs out of traction before the trailer runs into trouble, because it's running on Pirelli P Zero tyres rather than chunkier off-road rubber. But you wouldn't be as daft as us if you were doing this for real.

But there's fundamentally no reason why you wouldn't use a Bentayga for this kind of thing. It has got the right towing capacity, can raise its suspension, has good visibility and has oomph to spare. And one of the reasons you choose a caravan or trailer over a motorhome is that you can set up camp and then head off in the car – and it's nicer to head out in a Bentley than most other things, isn't it?

We set up camp on a flattish bit of field, but the EXP-7's air suspension automatically levels out the van anyway. It's got an electric awning both sides and is described as having an 'indoor/outdoor' kitchen. There's a fridge-freezer inside and another one that pulls open like a mortuary drawer outside. Then you flip up a panel and decide which side of it you want to work: outside for the barbecue experience or inside if you want burger van vibes. I go for the latter and plug in the induction hob. The solar panels are so good and the battery is so big that you could cook for a party and wouldn't flatten the battery overnight.

BBQs outside, induction hob inside. Healthy ingredients model's own

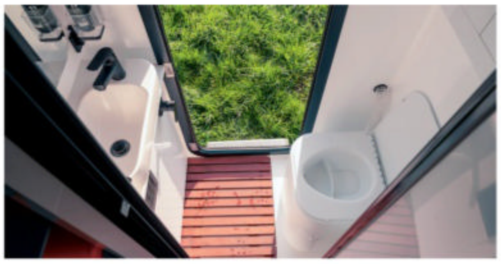
At 10kWh capacity, I wonder how far the EXP-7 could drive itself off road if you connected a motor to a wheel. The trailer can also hold 280 litres of water, there's a shower, a loo, a door directly into the wet room, two sinks and a diesel heater. And did I mention the washing machine?

The EXP-7 gets two choices of roof: one with an electric pop-top like ours, which makes for a lower roofline, or a hard top, which is better insulated but will always be tall. I think it depends how many low bridges or trees you want to go under. In the British spring I might recommend the hard top. After an evening of good food and terrible jokes I climb into the double bed (the sofa also converts to bunks) with the heater on; at 2am I wake to the faint smell of diesel in either my nostrils or my imagination, so I turn it off, then I wake again at 6am glad I wore a nightcap as a novelty photo prop.

In truth, the EXP-7 feels a little over-engineered for the UK. I love the idea of overlanding, or 4x4 touring, but you'll never be more than 5.6 miles from a road in Britain and no more than 70 miles from the sea, and you'll keep tripping over towns all the time.

But there are wilds within a day or two's drive, where this third-of-a-million-quid convoy wouldn't look quite so conspicuous. Or, if it did, there'd be nobody to see it. And I get the appeal: to feel on the edge of civilisation; to sit, relax, eat, sleep and do the laundry, in splendid isolation.

Prior dreams of 20deg eco-wash cycles and wrinkle-free drying



EXP-7's solar panels and 10kWh battery pack put the 'amp' in 'glamping'

Loch Beinn Dearg
344m west of it is the furthest you can be from a road in the UK, at 5.6 miles

Overland alternatives

If you want to go overlanding but a £190,000 trailer is just a bit too much for you, try one of these more affordable options…

HYMER GRAND CANYON S
£90,840
A four-wheel-drive camper based on a Mercedes-Benz van. Sleeps up to four; has a sliding door so you can do some parcel deliveries when you're not away exploring the world.

VOLKSWAGEN T3 SYNCRO
£10,000 (est)
Volkswagen's T3 van with four-wheel drive and a practical interior that can be campered up to your heart's content. Autocar's picture editor, Ben, loves his.

HONDA AFRICA TWIN
£3000 (est)
You have to pack rather more sparingly, of course, but if you want to go farther than anyone else and with a smaller footprint, a motorcycle is the answer.

DIY TRAILER
£1500
Ex-MOD Penman trailers are sold by military surplus suppliers. With a bit of work you could end up with the rugged off-road trailer tent built to your perfect spec.

> *“The Bentayga runs out of traction before the trailer runs into trouble”*

BRUDER EXP-7
Price £190,000 (est); €218,500 (EU)
Body length 5760mm
Overall length 6995mm
Height 2350-2650mm
Weight 2700kg
Solar 1250W
Battery 10kWh
Water 280 litres

Unknown pleasures

RML specialises in doing things it can't talk about, but its Bespoke division products are changing that. FELIX PAGE finds out more

PHOTOGRAPHY MAX EDLESTON

There are few meeting rooms in the British motoring industry that Paul Dickinson hasn't graced.

A real automotive lifer, he started at the Rover Group as an apprentice in 1997 then moved to Jaguar Land Rover's finance department when the company was bought by BMW. Dickinson would later go on to play a pivotal role in bringing the acclaimed LRX concept to production as the Range Rover Evoque. More recently he spent time at Bentley, where he was central to the conception and growth of the Mulliner coachbuilding division, and he was then finance boss at Group Lotus during the period when it was launching its new Chapman Bespoke division.

Wellingborough-based RML Group – a lesser-known and more 'backstage' engineering operation, historically rooted in motorsport – may on the face of it seem to be a strange place for him to end up. Appointed as group CEO in June last year at around the same time as RML was acquired by a US investor, he gives a fairly concise summary of his job description. "My remit," he says, "is to grow this business."

That doesn't just mean Dickinson will lean

on his finance experience to swell the company coffers, though; it's more about branching out into new business areas, claiming a bigger share of its markets and becoming more of a household name. Historically, motorsport engineering was this outfit's bread and butter, and RML is best known for its race-based collaborations with the likes of Nissan and Chevrolet, scoring British Touring Car Championship titles and Le Mans 24 Hours class wins. But today racing accounts for just 10% of RML revenues, and work is well under way to diversify the firm's output and ensure it's participating in as many 'races' as possible – just not so much on the track these days.

It all starts here with the P39, an untouchably exclusive, carbonfibre-bodied reworking of the Porsche 911 Turbo S, one that promises to outpace a GT3 RS on the track while remaining as usable in the real world as any factory-fresh supercar. As the second model from RML's nascent Bespoke division, it is designed with influence from the legendary 911 GT1. Its blown flat-six engine has been tickled by Litchfield to produce almost as much power as a Bugatti Veyron, the bespoke bodywork and active aero generate up to 930kg of downforce and it costs £540,000 plus the cost of your donor car.

Like the Ferrari 250 GTO-inspired Short Wheelbase from a few years back, the P39 has been conceived both as a revenue generator and a technical tour de force that showcases RML's awesome engineering might, which for so long has been hidden under a bushel by the outfit's positioning as a white-label engineering and design partner to big-name OEMs.

"The whole point of the Bespoke division," says Dickinson, "is for us to come out of the shadows and demonstrate in the consumer world: here are our products, here is our engineering quality, here is our skill, here is our attention to detail, here is all of our motorsport heritage – applied to something relevant to you." Then the idea is that the commercial success of these Bespoke products will help to grow the core engineering consultancy business. He adds: "Each time we have a successful product, that reflects back on the wider RML brand."

So these creations must be not only unfathomably capable but also, crucially, achingly desirable – and doubly so in the face of intense competition from the bespoke divisions of the luxury car makers themselves. And the key to that, as demonstrated by the monstrous profit figures generated by the likes of Rolls-Royce Bespoke and Lamborghini's Ad Personam, is exclusivity and personalisation.

It is here that Dickinson's experience in resurrecting Bentley's Mulliner as a coachbuilder for the new age comes into play. "That really helped me understand how the bespoke market works," he says. "Mulliner is the pinnacle, but it showcases the rest of Bentley's skills. When you brought a customer in to devise their own spec, they realised just how impressive a Bentley is before you even Mulliner-ise it."

While each of the P39s will be identical in a technical sense, then, down to the bespoke suspension links, driver-adjustable aero, 100mm widened track and 25mm lengthened wheelbase, the rest of the specification is completely at the discretion of the owner. "Customers really appreciate uniqueness," says Dickinson. "There are some very wealthy people in the world, but they don't just spend money for the sake of it. They are very focused on value for money."

Dickinson theorises that the experience is sometimes as important as the end product, which helps to explain why RML has invested so heavily in ensuring that the process of personalising a P39 will be truly special.

When we visit, the customisation suite is still a work in progress, but already it is apparent that this will be a quite agreeable place for the 39 well-heeled owners to spend a few hours. ▸

"The P39 has been conceived as a technical tour de force"

Autocar-specced P39 is clothed in sleek carbonfibre bodywork

RML's design and engineering expertise is rooted in motorsport

Paul Dickinson has spent time at Rover, Lotus, JLR and Bentley

MAKING BATTERIES BETTER

If the Bespoke programme is a step outside RML's historic comfort zone, the VarEVolt battery packs it is developing in a new dedicated facility next door is almost otherworldly.

As used by the unthinkably rapid Czinger 21C hybrid hypercar, VarEVolt is said to be the highest-density automotive battery pack in the world, generating 6kW per kilo and, according to Michael Mallock, capable of "dumping all its power really, really quickly" thanks to a monumental C-rating (that's how quickly it can charge and discharge) of 200. A Porsche Taycan, for reference, has a C-rating of around four to five.

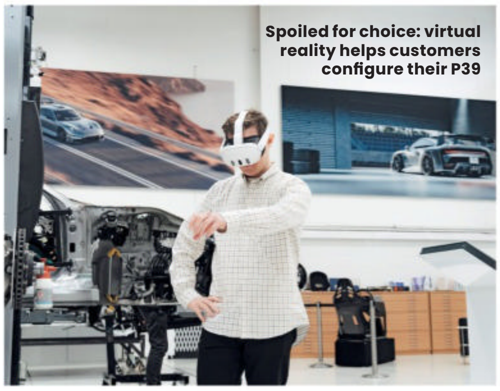
In the case of the Czinger's pack, that means it can deploy its entire 4.5kWh capacity in as little as 40 seconds. It's a characteristic that makes it well suited for deployment in a high-output plug-in hybrid powertrain.

"We've pivoted the powertrain team from being mainly ICE to mainly EV – battery and system integration," explains Mallock as he guides us around RML's battery development hub. Currently, output is small and matched to customer demand, but he says it can be scaled up quickly – and it won't necessarily be limited to ultra-exclusive, low-volume propositions.

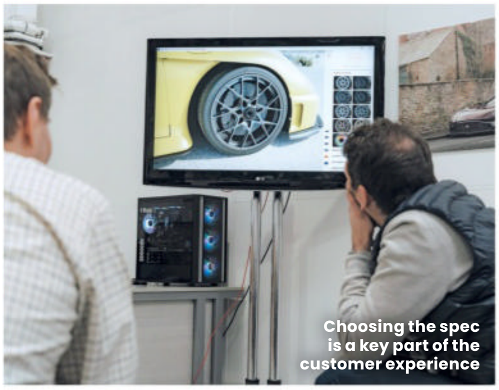
"We started doing battery design and manufacturing in-house because there was not a supplier that could deliver what we required," says Mallock. "Also, some of the work that we're doing here is supporting OEMs with their next generation."

The whole point of VarEVolt is that the system is modular and scalable, so it can be used in a variety of different applications. Paul Dickinson explains: "We can focus on range, we can focus on power, or we can balance the two – because what we need in a PHEV is different from if you were using it in a BEV."

Naturally, talk of future customers and partners on the VarEVolt programme is quickly shut down, but Mallock does reveal that RML is working on a conversion kit for old hybrid hypercars – think LaFerrari, McLaren P1, Porsche 918 – which could drastically increase their performance potential. He says: "For those types of cars we can do a replacement pack that will significantly increase the range, and if the rest of the hardware within the car would allow it, you could have a version that was eight times the power output."



Spoiled for choice: virtual reality helps customers configure their P39



Choosing the spec is a key part of the customer experience

Colour options and trim materials should satisfy most tastes

The P39 starts life as a 911 Turbo S, but RML's mods are transformative

Cabinets are topped with reams of strokable material swatches and paint sample cards to agonise over, before you have a play with the shift paddles and test out the various options for the door pulls. There's also a VR headset on hand so you can walk around a life-size digital version of your car. It allows you to see how different colours and materials change according to lighting, and you can get as comfortable with your spec as possible before pulling the trigger.

I'm excited to give it a go but, allowed such dizzying freedom of expression and a hypothetical bottomless pit of money to spend on options, I find myself racked by a paralysing sense of indecision. Whiling away your lunch break on a configurator can be a relaxing exercise in escapism but, even allowing for the fact that it's all imaginary, speccing a P39 – with the boss at your side and the production line over your shoulder – feels rather more daunting. I want to do justice to RML's lovingly engineered creation and honour its performance potential by not going 'full Knightsbridge' with my virtual supercar, but this is a drop-dead silhouette that begs for some lurid adornment.

So Autocar's P39 is – appropriately – bright yellow. More particularly, it's a shade that's inspired by the legendary Ruf CTR 'Yellowbird', another 911-based monster that has claimed its fair share of scalps at the Nordschleife. I don't want the interior to be so overtly decorated, but playing it safe with black feels like a missed opportunity. So I split the difference with a tasteful tan and choose a suitably technical wheel design that befits the engineering-led approach to the P39's design. Were we ordering one of the first 10 cars, our example would have come with a special 'RML 40th anniversary' trim package, complete with bespoke badging, embroidery and subtle red detailing – the precise hue of which has been the source of considerable debate among its makers.

Michael Mallock, son of founder Ray Mallock and now head of the Bespoke division, says that, irrespective of the colour and trim chosen, all 39 owners of the P39 can be sure they have bought one of the most capable and technically impressive road cars on the market. "But the key with this project," he adds, "and any vehicle that we do with Bespoke – previously and going forward – is that it's all usable performance.

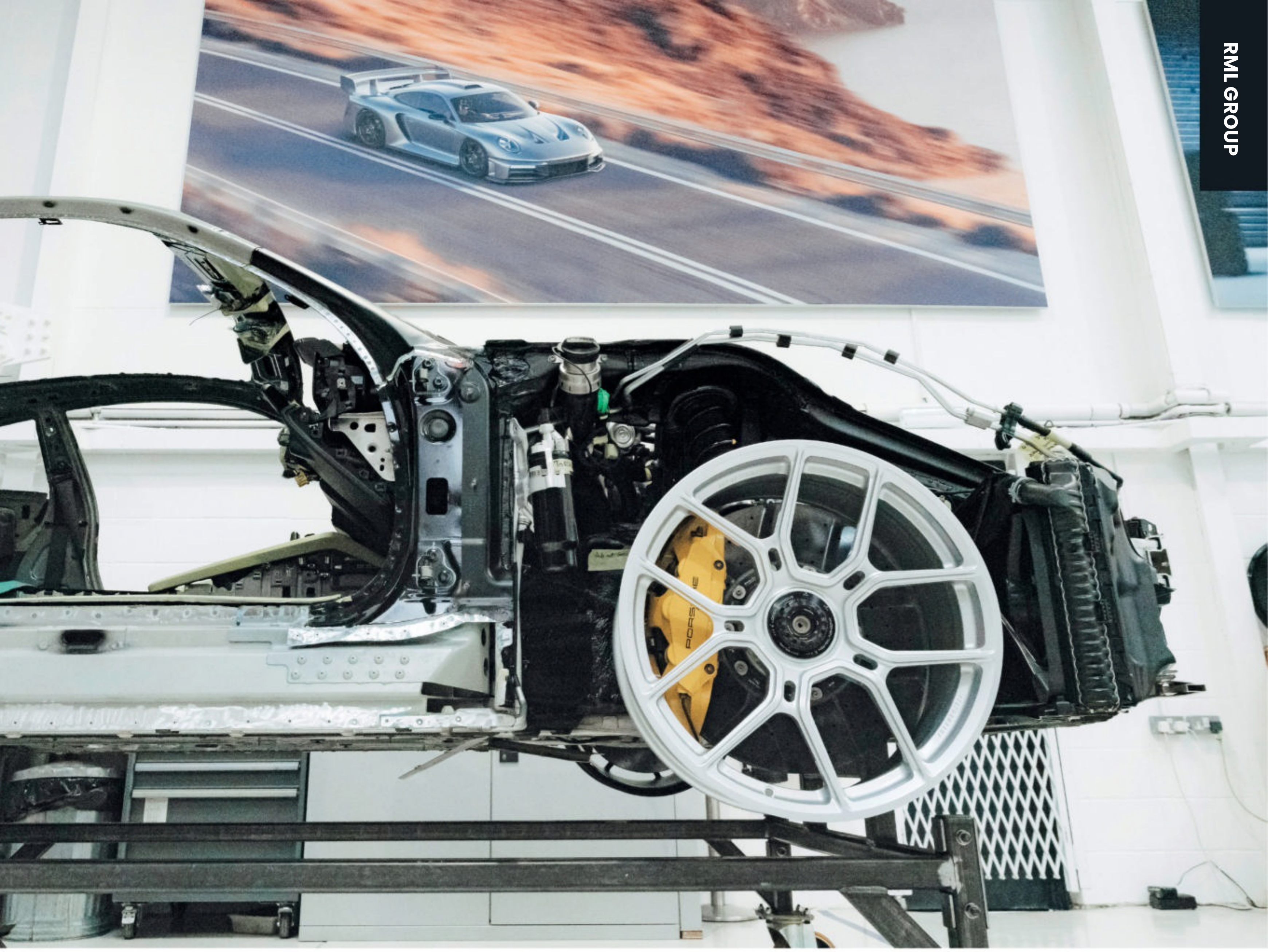
"The main reason that the P39 has the dynamics it does is that I hate driving performance cars on the road. We've tried to retain as much of the usability and flexibility that the 911 Turbo S has. In Normal mode it will feel quite sensible and not overly stiff, but then you can put it into Track mode and it will be capable of doing a sub-6min 45sec lap around the Nordschleife."

That duality and ease of use – unusual attributes for such a rapid and hardcore machine – underpinned the project's conception, says Mallock, which is why such rigid attention was paid to ensuring the substantial increase in performance didn't come at the expense of ride comfort or composure. RML claims that in 96.8% of road driving – referred to in hushed tones around the workshop as 'The Magic 97%' – the P39 has the same wheel rate as the Turbo S on which it is based.

Does that mean P39 owners will be inclined to use their car on a daily basis rather than rush it into a hermetically sealed private collection? "Go to Sainsbury's and do the school run?" laughs Mallock. "I would be incredibly surprised, but I would love to see it." The P39's use case as a supermarket shuttle is perhaps not cemented by the fact that the 911's frunk has made way for a colossal air dam, sealed away behind that one-piece carbonfibre front end, but even so this is clearly not a car that has been engineered exclusively for circuit dominance.

The more P39s that do venture out in public the better, as far as RML is concerned: the expansion of the Bespoke division is all about shouting the company's name from the rooftops. The Short Wheelbase, the P39 and whatever follows on from it will play important roles in increasing the

> *"It's hard to publicise what you do when you can't talk about it"*



company's visibility, celebrating its engineering prowess and pitching it as real competition to the luxury car market stalwarts.

If that also serves as a chance to give some exposure to the teams engineering these amazing machines, then that's a handy bonus, says Mallock: "It's hard to publicise what you do when you can't talk about it – and it's also not great for the team that's delivering it, when they can't talk about it." Imagine playing a pivotal role in creating a knockout supercar capable of absolutely blistering lap times, but it wears another company's badge and you've signed a non-disclosure agreement so you can't boast about your contribution. Now, with RML selling cars under its own name, you can.

As for what will come next, everyone is keeping schtum – but Dickinson suggests it will slot neatly between the two existing Bespoke cars in positioning terms. He adds: "We had the Short Wheelbase as our first product, which is in the million-and-a-half-pounds price bracket, and the P39 is in the half-a-million-pound bracket. So there's probably a space in between where we could find something that fits." Whatever it is, though, Dickinson is clear about one thing: "It will always be fun and interesting."

RML'S HIDDEN GEMS

AMB 001 PRO

Aston Martin partnered Brough Superior to create this stunning 223bhp superbike with Valkyrie-influenced styling. It's sold as a track toy, but RML is tweaking this one for homologation so the owner can fit a numberplate and hit the road.

MALLOCK U2

Arthur Mallock's bare-bones U2 racer is credited with helping make motorsport accessible to the masses. Son Ray, in his seventies, still races one today, and Michael Mallock says its uncompromising form is a handy reminder of "where we came from".

MERCEDES-BENZ SLR McLAREN 722 GT

Lesser-known race version of the gargling McMerc supercar is an RML original, shedding nearly 400kg over the road car and cracking nearly 200mph. One of the 16 built in 2007 is back in for a full race-spec recommissioning.

NISSAN ZEOD RC

RML is probably still best known for the role it played in putting the Concorde-shaped Nissan Deltawing on the grid at Le Mans. But the closed-cockpit ZEOD RC it spawned is arguably more significant, completing the first full-electric lap of La Sarthe in 2014.

More miles for your moolah

Used EVs with a decent range are now available for less than you might think. **VICKY PARROTT** goes the distance

The used electric car market remains an erratic place, but there's good news if you're after a touring EV. There's a huge variety of long-rangers offering some 250 miles of real-world range and rapid charging for usefully under £20,000.

If you can, buy from a dealer with EV experience who can provide a battery report. Modern EV batteries are proving to be robust and long-lived, so don't be afraid of high-mileage cars. But with battery degradation still a factor, it's good to have full transparency on the charging history and state of health for the battery in the car you're considering.

Here's our pick of what's available.

KIA EV6 AIR

2022–2025

We seriously considered the EV6 for the top spot, here. It is great to drive and has the potential to charge much faster than the Polestar 2, and there's that seven-year warranty to consider. The EV6 also edges it for handling fun whether you go for the rear-wheel-drive or all-wheel-drive models. In the end, it only missed out on our number one position because it's a fair chunk more expensive. But if you've got the money, the EV6 is a brilliant long-range EV. It has just been facelifted and gained even more range, but stick with the 74kWh, rear-wheel-drive EV6 and you'll get a real-world range of roughly 240 miles, depending on the conditions.

2nd

SPECIFICATION
Price from £22,000
Battery 77.4/74.0kWh (total/usable)
WLTP range 328 miles
Real-world range 210-270 miles
Max charging rate 258kW

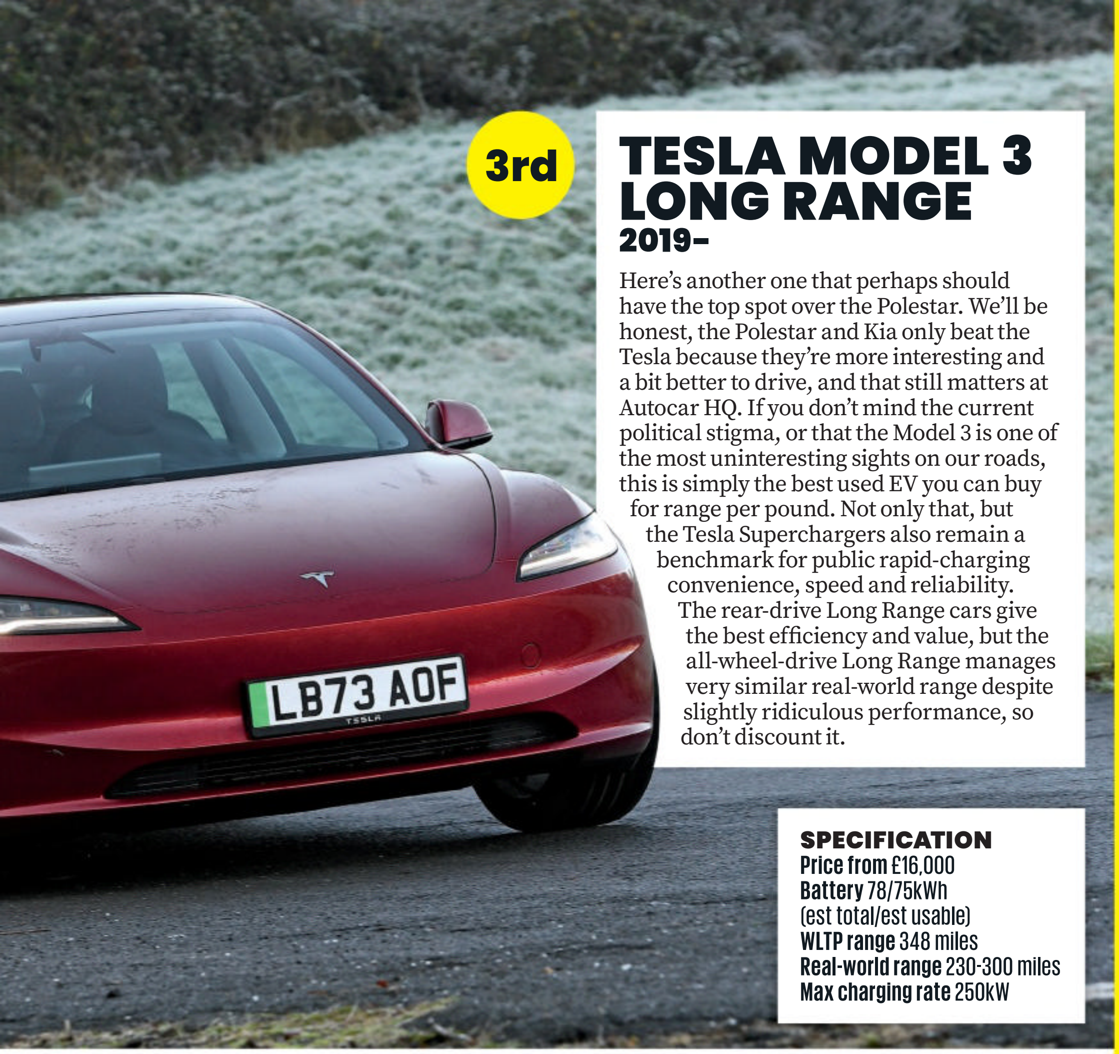
1st

POLESTAR 2 LONG RANGE SINGLE MOTOR

2021–2023

The Polestar 2 has been a hit from the moment it arrived, thanks to its understated Swedish style, fastback practicality, decent efficiency, Google Maps built in and slick dynamics. If you're considering a used electric car but want useful long-distance capability at a decent price, this is our pick of the bunch.

The 2, as its name suggests, is the second model from the bougie Volvo-Geely performance



3rd

TESLA MODEL 3 LONG RANGE

2019–

Here's another one that perhaps should have the top spot over the Polestar. We'll be honest, the Polestar and Kia only beat the Tesla because they're more interesting and a bit better to drive, and that still matters at Autocar HQ. If you don't mind the current political stigma, or that the Model 3 is one of the most uninteresting sights on our roads, this is simply the best used EV you can buy for range per pound. Not only that, but the Tesla Superchargers also remain a benchmark for public rapid-charging convenience, speed and reliability.

The rear-drive Long Range cars give the best efficiency and value, but the all-wheel-drive Long Range manages very similar real-world range despite slightly ridiculous performance, so don't discount it.

SPECIFICATION
Price from £16,000
Battery 78/75kWh (est total/est usable)
WLTP range 348 miles
Real-world range 230-300 miles
Max charging rate 250kW

SPECIFICATION
Price from £17,500
Battery 78/75kWh (total/usable)
WLTP range 340 miles
Real-world range 220-280 miles
Max charging rate 150kW

spin-off brand. We would recommend both the Dual Motor and Long Range Single Motor variants, but if range is your priority it's the latter that you should seek out. Initially with front-wheel drive and complete with a 75kWh battery, the Polestar 2 then had a facelift in 2023 that gave the Long Range Single Motor a bigger, 79kWh battery and more efficient rear-wheel drive motor, for a WLTP range of 406 miles. That facelifted car is our favourite used Polestar 2 (and our favourite new one, in fact). But they're still pretty pricey at some £28,000 and up, so it's the cheaper 75kWh model that's the real hero for long-range EV bargain hunters. It's a sophisticated drive, the interior stands up well to high mileages and you'll see roughly 220 miles as a worst-case scenario, or 270 to 300 miles in summer. Not bad, eh? A

In the hunt

JAGUAR I-PACE (2018-2025)

Real-world range 180-240 miles
Price from £14,000

The I-Pace is ace to drive, looks great and gets a useful real-world range: it will do 200 miles even on a cold motorway run. The 100kW charging could be faster, though.

KIA E-NIRO (2019-2022)

Real-world range 190-250 miles
Price from £11,000

The e-Niro is remarkably efficient: you'll see up to 5.0mpkWh and easily 190-240 miles of range, despite a comparably small 64kWh battery. It's a brilliant used buy.

HYUNDAI IONIQ 6 (2023-)

Real-world range 220-280 miles
Price from £26,000

The rear-drive version of the 75kWh Ioniq 6 has an official range of 338 miles, but 250-ish is more realistic. With loads of kit and ultra-rapid charging, it's got most bases covered.

PORSCHE TAYCAN 4S PERFORMANCE PLUS (2020–2024)

Real-world range 200-260 miles
Price from £37,000

The Taycan was a game-changer for the EV world, with brilliant ride and handling, useful range and ultra-rapid, 270kW charging. It's not cheap even now, but it's still a lot of car for the money.

FORD MUSTANG MACH-E EXTENDED RANGE (2020-)

Real-world range 240-300 miles
Price from £22,000

As a smart, spacious long-range EV, the Mach-E is great value. Ride is improved on post-spring 2022 cars.

NISSAN ARIYA 87KWH (2022-)

Real-world range 240-320 miles
Price from £27,000

You'll find more of the 63kWh Ariya on the market, but the 87kWh long-range version is the one to watch out for. It will do over 300 real-world miles, and looks fab inside and out.

MERCEDES-BENZ EQE 300 (2022-)

Real-world range 260-300 miles
Price from £36,000

The EQE is hard to justify when new, other than as a company car, but as a used buy it's a huge amount of tech and brand cred for a fantastic price. The 300 is the pick for value and impressive real-world range.

LIVING WITH A...

Where our long-term test cars have been and what they've done

"I realised light steering doesn't have to mean uncommunicative"

FINAL REPORT **MILEAGE 8028**

MAZDA MX-5

Is this the best MX-5 in the best spec, after all? Yes, we reckon it is

WHY WE RAN IT How easy is it to run a convertible as your only car in the depths of a British winter?

In the office I tend to sit next to our staff writer Charlie Martin and behind Classic & Sports Car's associate editor, Lizzie Pope. Since getting my long-term MX-5 they have both bought NDs. Coincidence? Absolutely not. I should be on commission.

In this line of work we're blessed with driving some of the best cars around. This section of the mag is full of interesting metal week in, week out – and the MX-5 is no exception. I've had a great selection of long-termers in this job, including an Alfa Romeo Giulia Quadrifoglio. But the MX-5's mixture of low-speed fun and dependable reliability has made it my favourite. It's a car that makes the everyday more enjoyable. But saying that, I also did a couple of not-so-everyday things in it.

At the start of the year I was invited along by Mazda to the world's first 'night-time track day' in Anglesey. Yep, North Wales, in the winter. At night. Very much in keeping with the 'why we ran it' element of this long-term report. The drop-top Mazda was perfect for the task; I couldn't think of anything better to do it in. It waltzed me effortlessly from London to Wales in comfort and with surprisingly good 40mpg-plus fuel economy. And then on track it was an absolute peach, flattering my driving and generally just being extremely good fun, communicative and everything you'd want in a track-day car that you also intend to drive home.

Before I knew it, another invite arrived. This time it was from the electro-modders at Electrogenic, wanting to know if I'd like to drive their new battery-powered Mk1 MX-5. Yes, please. And it was great: proper fun, with big, laugh-inducing skids, and all wrapped up in the unmistakable first-gen shell.

The MX-5 is fun even at low speeds

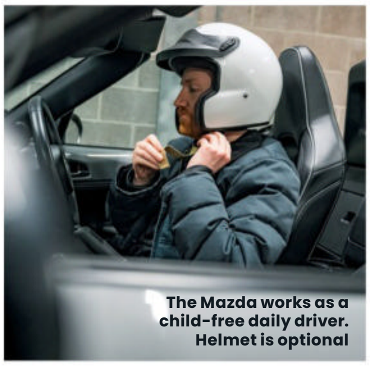
Recaro seats are excellent on long trips

SECOND OPINION

You almost don't want to celebrate the ND MX-5's astounding longevity for fear of finally scaring it off. Indeed, this stick-shift, pure-petrol plaything is starting to feel like a bit of an anachronism at 10 years old, but it's still one of the most rewarding, usable and affordable driver's cars on the market, so here's hoping no canny product planner has it in the crosshairs any time soon. **FP**

The Mazda was in its element on a nocturnal track day at Anglesey

Electrogenic's electrified Mk1 was a hoot, but ND is a far better all-rounder



The Mazda works as a child-free daily driver. Helmet is optional

Homura spec's BBS wheels look the absolute business

But as much as a laugh as that was, I couldn't help feeling it would be only a third or fourth car. Unlike my MX-5, which lays claim to first or perhaps second car status.

Some things about my MX-5 I loved immediately. The seating position and the weighting of the manual gearbox and pedals, for me, are the best in the business. There were other aspects that I grew to love. I thought the steering was a touch light at first, but after a few weeks, and with the benefit of driving a couple of palate-cleanser regular cars in between, I realised that light doesn't have to mean uncommunicative. It just means easy.

Cons are harder to find. I'm not nitpicking here when I write that the infotainment short-circuits my millennial brain: it doesn't allow me to use the touchscreen while the car is moving (there's a rotary controller for that). By the time the neurons in my brain (eventually) fire and the neurotransmitters trigger thoughts about not touching the screen, my greasy little digits are already prodding away. I have been conditioned by 20 years of touchscreen phones, and I suspect many others have. Admittedly I probably am nitpicking, though, when I complain that the windscreen washer bottle is a touch small at 1.2 litres. Not ideal for hacking around in winter.

Finally, we'll get round to the question we posed months ago: how easy is it to run a convertible as your only car in the depths of a British winter? Easy. For me. And I'd go as far as saying it would be easy for most childless readers who don't regularly need to transport anything particularly large.

Bonus question: is this the spec to go for? At the office, we regularly talk specs. And, as you might imagine, we often disagree. A few of us think all EVs should basically be the least powerful spec possible; others say we're missing out on all the huge torque. Some of us insist there's still room for diesel; others remind us that modern petrol hybrids can offer basically the same economy. But for the MX-5, top-rung Homura spec just makes sense. Recaro seats? Spot on. Even comfy on long journeys. Track mode? Simple, easy to use, flatters your driving and you can make use of it all the time. BBS wheels? Amazing – nothing else to note.

Yes, it's £35k – which sounds a lot for an MX-5. But a Mini Cooper convertible is £28,000, or £30k-plus if you actually want anything inside it. A Honda Civic Type R is £50k.

At the beginning of this test, I posited that the latest ND was the culmination of 36 years of MX-5 expertise. And it is. The next generation of Mazda sports car is promised to keep the atmospheric engine/rear-drive formula. But even so, I don't envy the engineers tasked with besting this ND.

MURRAY SCULLION

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TEST DATA

MAZDA MX-5 2.0 HOMURA

MILEAGE

At start 6086
At end 8028

PRICES

List price new £34,835
List price now £35,515
Price as tested £35,435

OPTIONS

Aero Grey paint £600

ECONOMY AND RANGE

Claimed economy 41.5mpg
Fuel tank 45 litres
Test average 39.1mpg
Test best 42.5mpg
Test worst 25.8mpg
Real-world range 387 miles

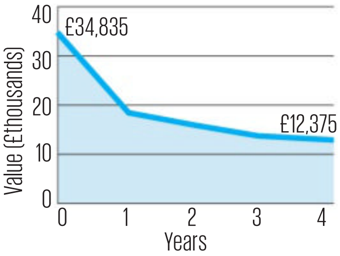
TECH HIGHLIGHTS

0-62mph 6.5sec
Top speed 136mph
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1998cc, petrol
Max power 181bhp at 7000rpm
Max torque 151lb ft 4000rpm
Gearbox 6-spd manual, RWD
Boot 130 litres
Wheels 7.0Jx17in, alloy
Tyres 205/45 ZR17
Kerb weight 1137kg

SERVICE AND RUNNING COSTS

Contract hire rate £464.64 pcm
CO_2 153g/km
Service costs None
Other costs Screenwash £11.98
Fuel costs £306.63
Running costs including fuel £318.61
Cost per mile 16 pence
Faults None

DEPRECIATION



PREVIOUS REPORTS

12 Feb, 19 Feb, 26 Feb, 12 Mar, 19 Mar, 26 Mar, 16 Apr

LOVE IT

PRE-DIGITAL APPEAL
Objectively the ND is simply the best of the MX-5. Despite EU-mandated technology, it still feels pretty analogue.

ERGONOMIC EXCELLENCE
The things that really matter – seating and steering position, pedal alignment, weight controls – are just as they should be.

DAY-TO-DAY LIVING
It's so easy to rub along with. Reversing camera, Apple CarPlay, cruise control. Using it as my only car was a breeze.

LOATHE IT

NO TOUCHING!
The touchscreen is logical, but Mazda makes me do 20 rotary controller clicks rather than one stab at the screen when moving.

WINDSCREEN WASHER
The windscreen wash reservoir is tiny. MX-5 Parts has a fabrication that gains another litre for £350. Which I think is well worth it.

FIRST REPORT

BMW 1 SERIES

Here's an entry version of an entry Bimmer at a not-so-entry price

WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT To see how much progress BMW has made with its popular entry-level model between generations

I really was taken aback by the discovery that my new BMW 120 incurs the UK government's 'luxury car tax'. BMW is undeniably a premium brand, of course, and it's well known that the threshold for the VED supplement is some £13k lower than it would be if Keir and co reasonably accounted for inflation, but still, this is the cheapest model in BMW's cheapest series. I've always considered the '1er' hatchback a fairly affordable luxury, but evidently no more.

Two things are exacerbating matters. First, this series is much slimmer than it once was: as the 'F40' made way for the 'F70' last year, it took both diesel engines and manual gearboxes with it (at least in the UK), instantly raising the entry price by some £2000; and going back several more years, we lost the 114i and 116i models. Second, my car is not only in upper-level M Sport trim, some £2000 higher than basic Sport grade, but also has – get ready for it – fitted options totalling £10,415. The mad thing is that none of them seem superfluous or even particularly extravagant for a car of this kind.

It's not the price that seems to bother most people about the F70, however. Rather, it's the exterior styling. "It looks like a bloody Kia," I've heard more than one person scoff. Okay, and…? Most modern Kias look great to my eyes – certainly better than most recent BMWs. And perhaps that was inevitable with the 1 Series' switch from rear-wheel drive to front-wheel drive back in 2019 (I'm still not over the revelation that the vast majority of 1 Series owners surveyed by BMW didn't even know why their cars looked and handled the way they did). And even if it doesn't have that cab-rearward, long-snouted uniqueness of the old RWD cars, I think we can all agree that the F70 looks much smarter than the dumpy, snorty F40.

I imagine my car is representative

Interior has a luxurious aura, thanks not least to its cream upholstery

Rear passengers get notably more space than in the old RWD days

SECOND OPINION

We need to talk about the way this car looks. At the back, there's a '120' badge, because it's no longer called a 120i, which just looks wrong to me. And for me the slightly boy racer M Sport spec seems a bit much for a 1.5-litre three-cylinder jobbie. **MSc** of what you will typically see of the F70 on the road, considering that there's only the choice of 120, 123 xDrive and hot M135 xDrive variants now, and British car buyers apparently have an incurable addiction to sporty-looking, big-alloyed specifications and like their transport to reflect their gloomy surroundings. Yes, there are no fewer than four shades of grey on offer. Hat tip to anyone brave enough to order the purple.

The F70 being more of a heavily updated F40 than an all-new car, my 120's engine is the familiar 'B38' turbocharged three-cylinder petrol unit, albeit now with a 48V mild-hybrid system, connected to a seven-speed dual-clutch automatic gearbox with paddle shifters.

MHEV technology promises to simultaneously improve performance and economy, and indeed the car serves up a healthy 154bhp and an impressive 53.0mpg officially, up from 134bhp and 47.9mpg in the equivalent old 118i. It sure feels a lot punchier than I had expected upon seeing a low cylinder count.

Moreover, BMW claims that "the agility, steering precision and cornering dynamics of the new 1 Series benefit from the increased rigidity of the body structure and the chassis connection", plus my 120 has been further enhanced by the M Sport Package Pro, including M adaptive suspension (the ride seems very firm even in default mode, but apparently this actually "further increases the vehicle's dynamic potential without compromising comfort") and M Sport brakes (red calipers mean you can't miss 'em).

The car's interior has also exceeded my expectations, despite that startling £43k price as tested.

Thanks to the Technology Plus Pack, BMW's dashboard-topping Curved Display, which combines the digital instrument display with the infotainment touchscreen, has grown slightly larger and is packed with every gizmo I could imagine.

The cream-coloured upholstery looks fabulous (Veganza faux leather is mandatory but also comes in brown, red and black or in combination with Alcantara).

And although many will see them as tacky, I'm a fan of the M Sport tricolour stitching and ambient lighting panels on the dashboard. (I might add that the appropriate sections flash red if you're about to open your door into somebody's path – one active safety innovation to be welcomed.)

There's also – and I know this sounds silly – that new BMW aroma. I can't think of another brand that has such a distinctive one. It's easily recognisable and, I think, really rather nice. But yes, this is coming from someone who loves to smell a freshly printed magazine…

I must say there is one thing I'm miffed about in here: the lack of adjustable lumbar support for the driver. I mean, come on.

These things really are of the utmost importance: BMW's market research has revealed that the average 1 Series customer is most interested in interior luxury and accommodation. The likes of you and I, meanwhile, naturally prioritise driving enjoyment. Various 1 Series have sat at varying places on the spectrum over the years, but it seems to me that this one might be capable of pleasing everybody. I do hope it will prove me right.

KRIS CULMER

TEST DATA

BMW 120 M SPORT

Price new £32,775 **Price as tested** £43,190 **Options** Technology Plus Pack £2750, M Sport Package Pro £2075, panoramic glass sunroof £1050, electric front seats with driver memory £730, Skyscraper Grey metallic paint £650, Harman Kardon surround sound audio system £550, 19in '976' M bi-colour alloy wheels £540, automatic air conditioning £480, electric bootlid £390, sun protection glass £320, black roof £315, Oyster perforated Veganza upholstery £215, heated steering wheel £175, split folding rear seats £175 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Economy** 53.0mpg (WLTP)

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"The fitted options total – get ready for it – £10,415"

There's lots of room to play with – if you figure out how to access it

JEEP WRANGLER

Forget superminis: this huge 4x4 is the ultimate car for the suburbs

MILEAGE 5540
WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT To find out if the quintessential Jeep is really a vehicle you can live with every day

When I talk about this Jeep being a great car in the suburbs, people tend to laugh. They're thinking about its height, size and weight rather than other things that matter every bit as much, perhaps more.

But, believe it or not, you've got practically everything going for you. You sit high in a vehicle visible to oncomers from all angles. Its body has straight sides and isn't as wide as people think. Including mirrors, it measures just 1.87m, which is usefully less than the Land Rover Defender (2.1m).

For passengers, the firm and upright seats, set high, make for a much more sociable travelling experience. And kids can see stuff they're denied in today's high-waisted SUVs – and seeing stuff, as any parent knows, is the key to a dramatic reduction in the number of 'are we there yet?' requests.

But the handiest thing of all is the wheel and tyre package. This Sahara model wears tall and fat-walled (70-series) all-season Bridgestones on good-looking 18in alloys. They come as close to being kerb-proof as any combination I've tried, yet they don't have the aggressive and noisy off-road pattern that comes standard with the more off-road-focused Rubicon model, so they're reasonably quiet at 70mph on the motorway.

When you're faced with one of those impossible situations with oncoming traffic in town or on narrow country lanes when one or other of you has to drive up a kerb or stick a wheel onto a rough verge, the someone can always be you. The Wrangler is made for the job.

Other town advantages? There's the smooth and flexible 2.0-litre engine that pulls from nothing. There's the super-smooth automatic transmission with a first gear that's low enough to let you amble along at ultra-low speeds – perhaps behind the bicycles that are so prevalent at this time of the year.

Even the ride quality, hard by most standards, is stiff and tough enough to allow you to forge unconcernedly through pothole combinations that have other irate drivers phoning the local council.

To summarise, it's the Wrangler's simple, willing ability to cope with whatever it meets that makes it so appealing – and this quality is as useful in city centres as on country roads. It's fashionable to harp on about modern life's depressingly complex problems, but in the midst of all that, the Wrangler always seems to have a simple, happy solution.

STEVE CROPLEY

LOVE IT

IT'S BULLETPROOF
Every day I revel in this quality. The bumpers are massive, the side protection is effective, the tall tyres protect the big alloys from kerbing and the suspension can cope anywhere.

LOATHE IT

WEIRD BOOT ACCESS
You first press a button to swing the tailgate out, avoiding the huge spare wheel mounted on it. Then you lift the rear glass up on gas struts. It works – but don't get the closing sequence wrong!

TEST DATA

JEEP WRANGLER 2.0 GME SAHARA

Price new £61,125 **Price as tested** £62,090 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Economy** 25.7mpg **Last seen** 30.4.25

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CUPRA LEON

With important cargo to ferry, will our sporty estate step up to the plate?

MILEAGE 6326

WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT With sports car pace and dog-friendly space, could this rapid wagon be the ultimate do-it-all daily driver?

Manufacturers spend millions on making sure their cars ride right: computer simulations, rough-road testing, Belgian pavé… Volvo's even built an extremely realistic replica of a knackered British country lane at its Swedish test track, which tells you all you need to know about how our roads are perceived.

But I can't work out why they need to bother at all. I've stumbled on an utterly foolproof test of rolling refinement that costs about £9.50, takes 34 minutes and exposed shortcomings in the Leon's chassis.

You can thank my parents, who had invited too many people for lunch on Easter Sunday and texted me in a panic that morning asking me to bring some plates so nobody had to eat their macaroni cheese out of a hastily scrubbed dog's bowl. Thinking nothing of this mundane request, I gathered up a pile of my finest china (Waitrose, 2014 – stolen from my nan when I went to university) and plonked it on the Cupra's back seat in a bag for life.

Bad move. Just a few hundred metres after setting off, the clinking, jangling racket from behind my left ear had become so irritating that I was frantically scanning the road ahead for somewhere to pull up and rearrange my load. But when I eventually managed to stop, I wasn't really sure what to do about it. Short of stuffing a cleaning cloth in the middle of the stack, I had nothing to hand to alleviate the clattering, and so it was that I endured an arduous half an hour of dodging potholes and speed bumps with the radio turned all the way up in an attempt to drown out the noise.

Waitrose's finest, removed from their bag for life, survived the trip but…

…the thin sidewalls of the tyres and stiff springs made it a trip to remember

To make matters worse, I had two colossal containers of Lego in the boot – a forgotten hangover from the nail-biting build-off challenge we ran in the Christmas edition of Autocar – which were rattling away irritatingly out back like Bez at a Happy Mondays gig.

LOVE IT

SCREEN TIME

This latest generation of VW's MIB infotainment is vastly crisper, quicker and more intuitive to use.

LOATHE IT

DUSTY SPRING FEEL

Satin paint seems to actively attract pollen and dust, which makes the car look neglected between cleans.

Call me dramatic if you will. Or call me an idiot, maybe, for not appropriately securing my cargo. But I do think it raised an interesting point about the compromises that are inherent to a more dynamically focused chassis set-up. I've filled dozens of cars to bursting with untold amounts of flotsam and jetsam in the past, and I find that if you're smart with your packing, you can usually avoid any untoward aural accompaniment as you drive along. I once moved my partner from Leeds to Basingstoke in a Peugeot 405 and didn't hear a peep from the rear quarters for 200 miles – save for the painful twang at Watford Gap services when the handbrake cable snapped.

But it seems the Cupra is simply too stiff of spring and slim of tyre sidewall to let you forget what you're ferrying. To be entirely fair, three metric tonnes of Lego and a leaning tower of crockery would make a din in any car, but the whole saga has shone a light on just how firmly the Leon rides around town.

Even with an empty boot and back seat, I'm now acutely aware of the juddering on poorly surfaced road and I've clocked a pretty severe thud from the front end if I approach the single-lane speed bumps that blight my commute too quickly. The same is true of potholes, which at their most severe can feel like they're going to bounce me out of my seat – though more disconcerting is the noise as those meaty, thinly wrapped alloys crash against the edge of the broken Tarmac. No punctures or cracked rims yet, thank goodness, and I'm driving as cautiously as I possibly can to ensure it stays that way.

It's frustrating because the Leon is decently refined at a high-speed cruise and impressively capable on a smooth, flowing B-road. It's just that you have to wince your way through the suburbs to get it out into its comfort zone. I'll head there for the next update.

FELIX PAGE

TEST DATA

CUPRA LEON ESTATE 333PS 4DRIVE VZ2

Price new £48,410 **Price as tested** £49,105 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Economy** 25.3mpg **Last seen** 23.4.25

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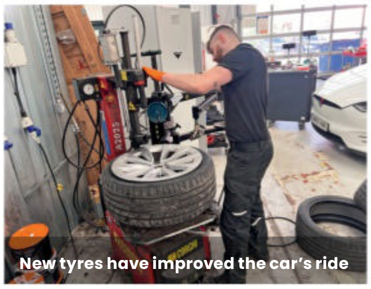
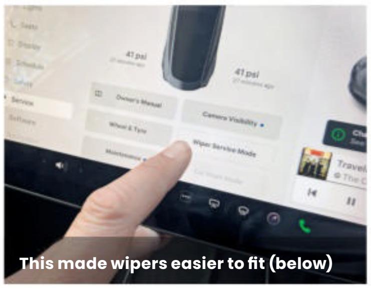
TESLA MODEL 3

Our used car feels as good as new after some fettling

MILEAGE 41,073
WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT To find out if an approved used car is the best route into Tesla ownership


New tyres have improved the car's ride


This made wipers easier to fit (below)

Such is the advanced level of tech, and the lack of obvious wear and tear, that it's easy to forget my Model 3 is actually more than four years and 40,000 miles old. But there is the odd reminder, such as the fact that the wipers were rubbish and overdue replacement.

So I nipped to my local Euro Car Parts and grabbed a set of Valeo wipers – not cheap at £55 the pair – and fired up the Tesla app to check the 'Do it yourself' section, which has a useful guide to changing them. Handily, within the Service menu on the central screen is a button for 'Wiper service mode', which parks the wipers about a third of the way up the windscreen to make switching blades a doddle.

The next bit of maintenance wasn't a DIY job. Since the car arrived, I have been disappointed by the ride quality: the primary ride is decent enough, if firm, but the secondary ride can be really niggly. It's sufficiently bad that it can make the car feel oddly skittish at speed – despite its heft, at 1919kg unladen.

It seems to vary from car to car: some Model 3s I've ridden in (often Ubers) appear to ride more sweetly and it's definitely better with a load on board. But then my mechanic friend, Tim, spotted a potential reason. Although the tyres still had some life left in them (under Tesla's Certified Pre-Owned programme, all cars have at least 10,000 miles left on them at point of sale), they were dated May 2020, a year older than the car, and showing their age with cracks and crazes. That pointed to hard, unyielding rubber, which won't do much for the ride, and they were also really badly shouldered so it made sense to replace them.

Interestingly, around the same time, Kwik Fit released research that suggested Teslas are harder on tyres than any other car in the UK. The Model 3 topped its table of cars that require replacement rubber at an above-average rate in 54 areas across Britain, the most of any car, with the Model Y coming third.

I opted to take the car back to my supplying dealer, Tesla Centre Gatwick, but shop around and my car's 235/40 R19 Hankook Ventus S1 Evo 3s can be had for around £180 a corner, fitted. While I waited, I had a look at the latest Model 3 facelift in the dealership: aside from looking a bit sharper from the front (to my eyes the rear of the older car looks better), it's little changed from my four-year-old car, though my daughter would appreciate the new touchscreen panel in the rear.

A couple of hours later and my decision to invest in new tyres was vindicated. The ride is still very firm but it feels more supple – and quieter – over small road imperfections, and I have more confidence in grip levels in the wet.
ALASTAIR CLEMENTS

LOVE IT

ON A CHARGE

The quality of wireless chargers in cars varies, but the Model 3's is great: sensibly sited below the main touchscreen, with charging pads for two phones.

LOATHE IT

IF IT AIN'T BROKE...

Why change the design of the good old sunvisor? The magnet on the driver's side no longer holds it in place as it rotates and the iPad-style cover is fiddly.

TEST DATA

TESLA MODEL 3 LONG RANGE ALL-WHEEL DRIVE

Price new £49,935 (in 2021) **Price as tested** £28,000 **Faults** Tyre-pressure sensor failure **Expenses** Tyres £720, wipers £54.99 **Range** 285 miles **Economy** 3.8mpkWh **Last seen** 30.4.25

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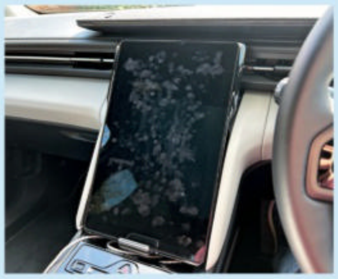
SNAPSHOTS

VOLVO EX40

Mileage 6554 **Last seen** 7.5.25
You might look at those physical buttons (above) and think how lucky I am to have a car with them. So did I, at first. And yet... I've hardly used them, because the car's touchscreen is so intuitive. Most useful functions, including the heated seats and climate controls, are just a tap or two away – and, as a bonus, the car remembers your previous settings each time you get in. **JW**

RENAULT SCENIC

Mileage 5311 **Last seen** 30.4.25
I'm enjoying playing with the Solarbay panoramic roof. It can turn the glass transparent or opaque, or a combination of both split front/rear, using a button on the roof or the voice control. In winter, I was letting the light in; in the warmer weather, it's keeping the rays out. It adds some theatre and real big-car premium allure – far better than a sliding roof. Renault says the space-saving tech allows the roofline to be 3cm lower too. **MT**



FORD EXPLORER

Mileage 2991 **Last seen** 7.5.25
The touchscreen went blank, prompting a web search to find how to reset it. Problem: search 'Ford Explorer touchscreen reset' and you get lots of hits for the unrelated US Explorer. Searching 'Ford Sync infotainment reset' netted two answers: one for cars with a power button and one for cars, such as this, without. By the time I went to do the reset, the system had fixed itself. **JA**

USED CARS

HOW TO BUY A MINI COOPER

THE HATCH WHOSE NAME NOW DESCRIBES ITS PRICE

The Mk3 Mini was replaced only last year yet you can buy one for £2k

With the option of five doors, a pure-electric version and a cleverly packaged platform that maximises interior space, the Mk3 Mini is a charismatic crowd-pleaser.

It is a few centimetres bigger than its predecessor yet still retains all the old-school qualities of agility and compactness that we love in its forebears. And now the new 'F66' generation is becoming a common sight after its launch last year, prices for the previous-generation model have tumbled to as low as £2000.

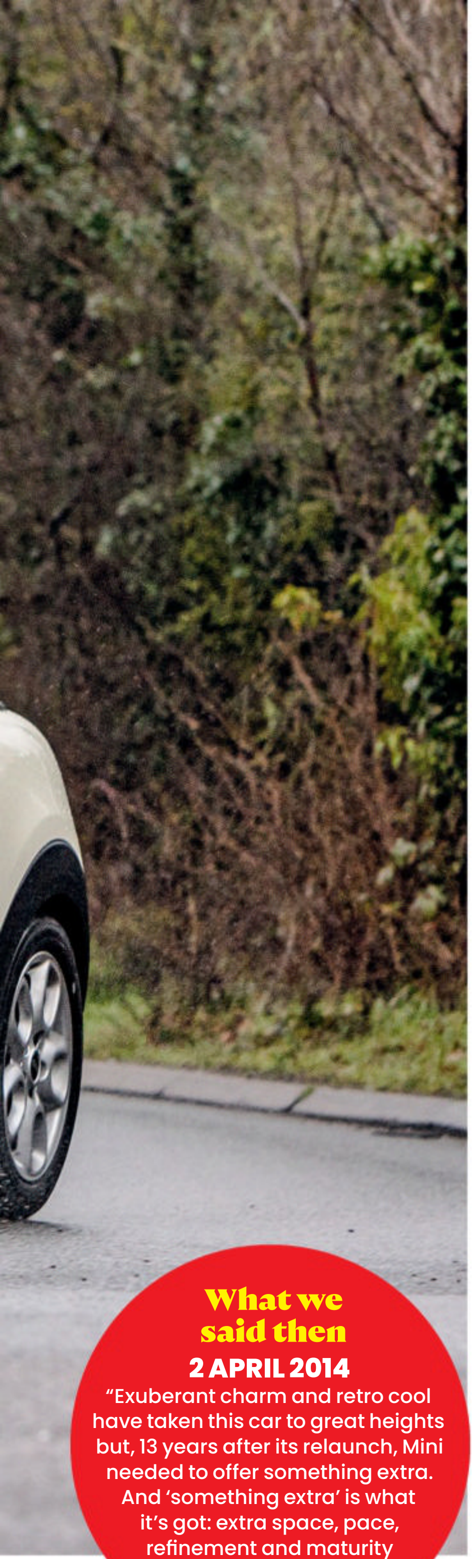
Of course, it's not as compact as its 1960s namesake, but the F56-gen Mini is ergonomically stronger than its predecessors and has a roomier cabin and boot. Bolstering its appeal is an interior dripping with retro character, greater perceived quality and intuitive technology.

Rear accommodation is still tight, but the five-door version is better and two extra openings make the world of difference. It's just as refined as the Audi A1 and of a higher quality than the Ford Fiesta.

High levels of grip give you the confidence to chuck it into bends like you're escaping Turin with the Carabinieri on your tail, and the compliant ride means all the gold you've stashed in the boot won't bang around – especially in cars fitted with the optional adaptive dampers (pretty rare these days).

The nippy Mini One, with its 101bhp 1.2-litre turbocharged three-cylinder petrol, is ideal for urban commuters, but we would aim for the 1.5-litre Cooper, with its more sprightly 134bhp turbo petrol three-pot. It's the better all-rounder and more entertaining to drive.

Retro-flavoured cabin is easy to use; note all of the physical switchgear



The hot Cooper S dials the driving experience up another notch thanks to its 189bhp 2.0-litre twin-turbo four-cylinder petrol engine. "The most complete affordable fast hatch you can buy" is how we described the Cooper S when we pitted it against its closest rivals. While it's firmer than its Cooper range-mate, its punchier motor and balanced chassis make it a fine companion for a brisk B-road jaunt.

Performance enthusiasts might be tempted by the John Cooper Works (JCW) for its 228bhp and trick suspension tune, which adds upgraded springs and dampers, anti-roll bars and a lightened multi-link rear set-up. It's excellent fun to drive but a bit stiff-legged and you're unlikely to need the extra grunt – plus an immaculate 55,000-mile JCW will cost you £5000 more than an equivalent Cooper S.

If you frequently cover big miles, you might be inclined to buy a diesel Mini, such as the 95bhp One D and 115bhp Cooper D. They cost only £20 to tax and will easily achieve a real-world 50mpg. That said, the Cooper SD, with its 168bhp, 266lb ft 2.0-litre BMW turbo diesel, is a bit more refined and no less economical.

As for the Mini Electric, we would think twice before buying one. It's fun, and ideal for short hops around town, but it has a real-world range of only 100-110 miles and that drops to about 80 miles in winter.

When it comes to trims, the entry-level One is pretty basic inside so aim for at least a Cooper – and find a car with the larger, more intuitive 8.8in infotainment screen.

The F56 was facelifted in 2018, which added new trims, headlights, quirky Union Jack tail-lights and smartphone mirroring as standard. More changes came in 2021, with a new front grille, interior technology and revised trims. But we would keep things simple and aim for a mid-2010s Cooper S. With a healthy budget of £8000, you can pick up a pristine 50,000- to 60,000-mile example and enjoy it all year round.

SAM PHILLIPS

What we said then

2 APRIL 2014

"Exuberant charm and retro cool have taken this car to great heights but, 13 years after its relaunch, Mini needed to offer something extra. And 'something extra' is what it's got: extra space, pace, refinement and maturity but, crucially, no less 'Mini-ness'."

All Minis are born to zip around corners but a Mk3 brings maturity too

> **"A Cooper S's punchy motor and balanced chassis make it a fine companion for a B-road jaunt"**

How to get one in your garage

AN OWNER'S VIEW

RACHEL LOWE

"I was looking for a step up from my 2013 'R56' Cooper and the F56 model was what I was hoping for in terms of reliability and performance. In the end, I bought a 2016 JCW from Scotland and the seven-hour drive home proved that this was the right car for me. It's very responsive, handles superbly and is surprisingly economical on longer journeys.

"I've added a few modifications, including a wrap, JCW Pro exhaust, front splitter/side skirts and the JCW Pro suspension kit. It's been very reliable and easily the most fun car I've ever owned."

BUYER BEWARE...

■ENGINE

Be wary of Cooper S Minis built between 2014 and 2015: a recall was issued to repair a defective crankshaft bearing and engines were either rebuilt or replaced. Check that the whole engine has been replaced because other parts may have been damaged by the faulty crankshaft.

High oil consumption is common on hotter models so check oil levels and make sure the car is serviced every year.

■EXHAUST

Ensure the Pro exhaust on the JCW cars is fitted properly. You'll know it isn't if the heat shield is rattling underneath the car.

■SUSPENSION

Listen out for a knocking noise from the front suspension as the control arm bushings like to make a racket when they're worn. A new bushing is around £30.

■BODY

Door seal rubber can rub away the paint on the inside so check for any damage. You can buy door-shut paint protection film to stop the issue from recurring.

Check for clouding in the wing mirrors. New glass is around £20.

■INTERIOR

Don't be surprised if the dashboard rattles, especially on higher-mileage cars.

A creaky sunroof isn't uncommon either and some lubricant around the seal can assuage the issue.

Check that the heated seats work and that the light doesn't go out on the dashboard when they're switched on. If they're faulty, then it could be either the heat element or control module that's to blame.

ALSO WORTH KNOWING

If you want the fastest version of the F56-gen Mini, your best bet is the John Cooper Works GP, launched in 2020. This track-focused hot hatch is an absolute riot to drive thanks to its lowered suspension, larger brakes and 302bhp turbocharged motor.

There are plenty of special editions to choose from, such as the 1499GT, a play on the 1275GT of the original car. There's also the 1to6 Edition, a limited-run version of the JCW that was the last Mini to feature a manual gearbox.

HOW MUCH TO SPEND

£2000-£6999

Mainly Cooper and Cooper D cars showing clear signs of use. Plenty of high-mileage Minis, but some good one-owner, full service history cars floating around.

£7000-£11,999

Broad mix of engines and trims but lots of very nice and well-maintained Cooper S cars. Mileage and age vary, with facelifted cars also available.

£12,000-£16,999

Cooper derivatives dominate and more post-2021 facelifted cars here. Low-mileage pre-2018 JCW Minis are in strong supply too.

£17,000-£21,999

The occasional low-mileage pre-facelift car but mostly post-facelift Minis in excellent condition with low mileage.

£22,000 AND ABOVE

Immaculate, nearly new cars being sold by dealers only.

ONE WE FOUND

MINI COOPER S, 58,000 MILES, £8494

It has a full service history, sports seats, sports exhaust and, says the seller, lots of optional extras. The mileage is reasonable and it's said to be in pristine condition.

My car & I

Top Trump Skyline proves a safe bet

Regardless of what he might think of Donald Trump, Jenson Vardell has the US president to thank for one thing: his Nissan Skyline. "I'd been saving money for four years and then, while following the US election, decided to bet the £20,000 I'd saved on Trump winning it," says Jenson. "When I placed the bet seven hours before the polling stations opened, it looked certain. I was that worried about the outcome, I didn't sleep for 48 hours, but on the day Trump was declared I won £34,000 including my stake, all tax free. It took half an hour to persuade the bookie I was who I said I was and for them to pay up!"

With the £14,000 prize money burning a hole in his pocket, Jenson set his heart on owning a Nissan Skyline, his dream car. He soon found just the thing in Devon: a GTS-T with the 2.5-litre six-cylinder turbocharged RB25 engine, following a conversation with the people at JDM, the Japanese car importers based in Newton Abbot.

"At the time, I was on holiday nearby with my girlfriend," he explains. "They said although they didn't have something for sale at my budget, they knew of an R33 Skyline for sale locally that was cheap enough and which they reckoned was a good one. Without

Our cars

Low-key Alpina is far from a letdown

BY ALEX WOLSTENHOLME

Is my E90-generation D3 a proper Alpina? They're a bit like Porsche's 996-generation 911s, in that there's little love lost over them and they're seen as being a bit uncool. After all, in 1995 Alpina had stuck a 4.6-litre 333bhp V8 in an E36 3 Series, yet by 2007 they thought a 2.0-litre diesel was appropriate.

I admit that sounds like something of a letdown, and quite frankly it's difficult to get excited by the engine, which in this case wasn't as key to the package as an engine should be in an Alpina.

There is a reason for that, however. In the early 2000s, Alpina found itself in financial trouble, and it needed an affordable 'volume' seller to raise some revenue and help balance the books. Step in the D3.

D3 AXW
ALPINA
Sometimes maligned D3 is the real Alpina deal in a cheaper-to-run package

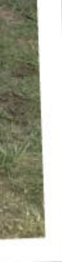
It had a Garrett turbo, the injectors and intercooler from a 535d and a special suspension set-up to give that famous Alpina ride. With 197bhp and more than 300lb ft it was enough to get from 0-62mph in 7.4sec, which wasn't too bad almost 20 years ago.

In the end, Alpina produced just over 2000 D3s across eight years. That's nothing for most manufacturers, but it was enough to keep the lights on in this case.

Carina Bovensiepen, the granddaughter of Alpina founder Burkard, agrees with me: "I'm also the proud owner of an E91 D3 with a manual gearbox – the last one for Alpina. Part of Alpina's philosophy is long-distance touring, and fuel consumption is a large part of that, so it's a complete lie that it is not a real Alpina. Plus, you can have a lot of fun with the car, and not just in the snow!"

Engine bay looks a bit grubby, but the 2.5-litre turbo six remains potent

Understated interior shows its age, but it's still a cracking drive



"At 2am last New Year's Day, Jenson was cleaning and lacquering the Nismo wheels"

telling my girlfriend, I changed our car's sat-nav to take me to it and then asked her to drive while I faked a nap. When she pulled up at the seller's house and I 'woke up', I told her she was looking at my next car on the driveway."

Of course, Jenson had to check it over first, including having the owner rev it hard in each gear to check for engine stutter. "There are plenty of bad Skylines for sale," he says, "but this was okay. There were a few things it needed, including new fuel lines and belts, so I knocked the price down to £12,900 from £15,000."

Before he and the seller could shake hands on the deal, though, Jenson had to be sure he could get the Skyline, which was registered in 1996 and imported in 2007, insured. "I was under 25 at the time, and for a while it looked like I wouldn't be able to get it covered," he says. "I spent hours on the phone trying to get a quote until eventually Admiral agreed to insure it and my old Fiesta, which I've kept, on a multi-car policy for just £1200 a year!"

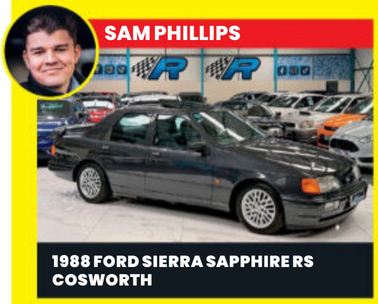
Today the Skyline is showing 95,000 miles. It's not immaculate – there are rust spots and the white finish looks a little flat – but perhaps its worst feature is the engine and engine bay, which really show their age. However, appearances can be deceptive. "I reckon the engine is still making 244bhp," says Jenson. "I'd always wanted a Skyline, and really, who doesn't want one of these cars? It's amazing to drive."

His dedication to his car is such that at 2am last New Year's Day, Jenson could be found cleaning, painting and lacquering its Nismo wheels. "They were originally orange but I prefer them black," he says. "People have told me that as Nismo wheels, they're almost worth as much as the car." Later in the year he plans to drive it to the Nürburgring where, in 1996, an R33 Skyline GT-R broke the lap record with a time of 7min 59.887sec. That would be a fitting tribute – and all because of Donald Trump.

JOHN EVANS

Head to head

SAM PHILLIPS



1988 FORD SIERRA SAPPHIRE RS COSWORTH

VS

JACK HARRISON

2020 RENAULT MEGANE RS TROPHY-R

Brief: Find a driver's car with an 'RS' badge for less than £50k

SP I've jumped on the Ford RS bandwagon and found this absolute peach: a late-1980s Sapphire Cosworth for £34,995. What have you got in the locker?

JH I hit the small ads looking for an Escort RS Cosworth, before quickly realising it's impossible to get one for less than £60,000. Instead I've picked this £35,100 Renault Mégane RS Trophy-R, a 296bhp manual hatch so hot it has double the amount of doors than seats and not one but two Rs in its name.

SP You might have my Sapph trumped on performance, but that livery makes what is a desirable hot hatch look like a stick of rock. My Ford is fast but understated – and it's more practical.

JH I can't really argue with that – a lack of rear seats does hamper day-to-day use, and the stickers are garish. But we're looking for an out-and-out driver's car, and there's nothing like a Renault Sport chassis. Plus it hasn't had to take nearly 40 years of hard abuse – people weren't known for driving Ford RS products carefully…

SP Agreed: I bet that Mégane is a riot. But there's plenty of driver appeal in my RS: it's rear-drive, so it's more fun than the 4x4, it weighs less than a Toyota GR86 and it has around 200bhp. And it's only done 39,000 miles from new.

CAUGHT IN THE CLASSIFIEDS

TOYOTA CELICA GT-FOUR COUPE

1997, 85,000 miles, £17,750

This '97 Celica is a sought-after rally-bred special. It was imported in 2010 and has new suspension struts, cambelt, clutch and brakes. It has also been tuned to 290bhp and comes with a new MOT.

HONDA CIVIC TYPE R EK9

1998, 152,000 miles, £18,995

The original EK9 is considered one of the best Type Rs. This example has done big miles but is in factory-fresh condition. The previous owner fully restored it, with thousands spent on new parts and bodywork. It's said to drive faultlessly, with no issues from the 1.6-litre VTEC.

SUBARU IMPREZA WRX STI

1999, 56,000 miles, £35,000

The Impreza became a WRC icon, and this particular WRX STI was built to celebrate the brand's success. This one was imported in 2003 and restored at a cost of around £25,000. Even the 300bhp turbocharged flat four has been rebuilt.

HONDA NSX

1991, 54,000 miles, £72,250

This automatic NSX was imported in 2012 and recently had an engine-out service and new tyres. The 3.0 V6-engined NSX is a treat to drive and would satisfy any wannabe sports car owner no end.

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The Autocar Lost in the archive

Austin A105 'Westminster' left Ford Popular 100E and MG Magnette in its wake

BMC's competition manager Hugh Chambers honours Sears (left) as Sopwith watches on

Excitement throughout first-ever BTCC season

The British Touring Car Championship is famed for its thrilling, close-fought action – a spectacle it has been providing for an impressive seven decades.

Britain's first proper touring car race occurred in 1952. The British Racing Drivers' Club had previously held a catch-all 'production car race' at its annual International Trophy meeting at Silverstone, but this time it decided to run two separate races for sports cars and touring cars.

Autocar's sports editor, John Cooper (not that one), explained: "No better way of assessing the relative performance capabilities of cars of any sort can be imagined than the straightforward one of racing them one against the other.

"Certain modifications are permitted, partly in the interests of safety and partly to render the task of the car's tuning and preparation somewhat easier than would otherwise be the case, but in all the essential features these cars are the same as those which are described in the catalogues, and which we could buy if they were not in short supply and if we had enough money."

Such racing predictably proved popular with British car makers, and the public loved it too. Hence it became a regular feature at Britain's multi-race club meetings.

The obvious next step was to create a championship, and it was the secretary of the British Racing and Sports Car Club, Ken Gregory, who made it happen.

His plan was to run the British Saloon Car Championship on the same ticket as sports car and junior single-seater races. The premise remained as our man had described in 1952, and to balance the varying performance levels, cars would be divided into four classes – meaning a 0.9-litre Austin A35 had the same chance of glory as a 4.0-litre Jensen 541, even though they would never dice with one another on track.

Gregory was also a director at Brands Hatch, so the Kent circuit staged a trial run on Boxing Day 1957 – and, this being a success, the host to the first points-scoring BSCC round in early April 1958.

In cold and dry weather, the first saloon race proved "quite the most interesting of the afternoon", we reported. "It was won almost as a foregone conclusion by Jack Sears, adding yet another victory to his string of successes with the Austin A105. But in the sub-1200cc class, tremendous battles were going on. For 11 laps, the A35s of George 'Doc' Shepherd and John Sprinzel circled as a pair, inches apart, until finally Sprinzel managed to overtake.

"There was a second race for cars up to 1600cc and over 3500cc. The [Mk1] Jaguar 3.4s, driven by Tommy Sopwith [son of the famous plane designer] and Gawaine Baillie, again took first and second with impressive ease."

Sprinzel and Sopwith won out again at Brands later that month, while Tommy Bridger made himself unpopular, you might assume, by topping the 1200-1600cc class in a German Borgward Isabella, "making the most of its fine cornering".

Sprinzel made it a hat-trick as the BSCC headed to Mallory Park in Leicestershire in May, while Baillie benefited from Sopwith's car shedding a tyre – and Harold Grace "had a spectacular escape when he inverted his Riley 1.5 in a ditch".

There was another Sprinzel and Sopwith show at Brands later that month, and again in June, albeit with the Jaguar man "having to work very hard" to steal the lead from his team-mate on the last lap.

Next up was Crystal Palace in Croydon, where for the first time all of the saloon classes shared a circuit. It was Sopwith again, while Shepherd "went surprisingly fast" to finish sixth in his baby Austin.

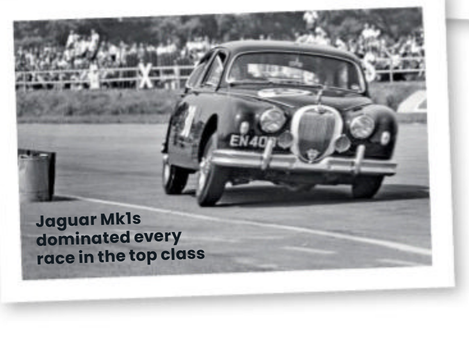
Three more Brands races would take the series to its conclusion, the first coming on an overcast August bank holiday. "Staple fare is the sight of a brace or more of 3.4s in the lead, cornering on the door handles. This was no exception." And nor was the September meet. So you'd assume Sopwith had the title all wrapped up – but, in fact, Sears had been quietly racking up wins for Austin in the class below, and the two not only arrived at the October meet with equal points but ended it level too.

The solution? A head-to-head in identical Riley 1.5s, swapping seats between two heats. The crowd were "amply rewarded for waiting to the end" in torrential rain as Sears prevailed by 1.6sec on aggregate.

Sopwith was perhaps vindicated in feeling aggrieved by the system – but, being British, he gave Sears a congratulatory handshake anyway.

KRIS CULMER

Race fans loved watching familiar motors duke it out



Jaguar Mk1s dominated every race in the top class

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In pre-war years, we concerned ourselves with braking effort, gradient climbing capability and rolling resistance. Later our attention shifted to take in acceleration, top speed, stopping distance and cruising noise level.

Today we use the Horiba MIRA proving ground in the Midlands to take similar performance benchmarks of new cars – and we've recently expanded the test's remit to take in braking stamina over repeated stops and, in the case of electrified cars, DC rapid-charging performance and measured acceleration at both high and low indicated states of battery charge.

Our tests are designed first and foremost to assess the fitness for intended purpose of any given new car – and to do it better and more thoroughly than any other independent test there is.

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Matt Saunders, road test editor

STAR RATINGS EXPLAINED

Autocar star ratings aren't like those you may read elsewhere. We don't simply give the best car in any given class five stars, the worst one star and filter the rest in between.

Rather than thinking in entirely relative terms, we rank cars according to more abstract definitions of their performance, functionality and fitness for purpose, so that every particular verdict means something and has a degree of permanence.

We also penalise cars up to a star for what we consider particularly conspicuous and regressive failings concerning active safety systems or missing instrumentation or physical secondary controls.

☆ Hopeless, egregious. In some cases, potentially dangerous.
⯪ Appalling. An emphatic failure.
★ Very poor. Consistently flawed or seriously misconceived.
★⯪ Inadequate. Sub-standard in key areas.
★★ Mediocre. Acceptable at best.
★★⯪ Competent. Mostly average, with very few highlights.
★★★ Respectable. Consistently decent, with some strengths.
★★★⯪ Good. Well rounded and competitive in key areas.
★★★★ Very good. Sets some new class standards and misses few.
★★★★⯪ Excellent. Extends several key class standards.
★★★★★ Exceptional, unsurpassed. All but flawless.

ABARTH

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
500 Esseesse	★★★★☆	25.3.09	Charm on a stick. Raucous and fun.	7.6	6.5	1135	35.8	-
500e Turismo	★★★⯪☆	9.8.23	A stylish and entertaining pint-size EV but pricey and needs refining.	6.9	6.4	1395	-	142
595 Competizione	★★★⯪☆	26.2.14	Great when it's good but tiring when it's bad.	7.5	6.4	1135	39.2	-

ALFA ROMEO

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Giulia Quadrifoglio	★★★★⯪	29.3.17	Everything you would want a fast Alfa Romeo saloon to be. A triumph.	4.5	3.2	1700	35.7	-
Stelvio 2.2D 210 Milano Edizione	★★★⯪☆	3.1.18	Likeable, if short of class's usual refinements.	6.8	7.0	1815	49.7	-
Stelvio Quadrifoglio	★★★⯪☆	9.1.19	A real driver's car, but it stretches SUV-related bounds of acceptability.	4.0	3.3	1931	31.9	-
Stelvio 2.0T 280 Veloce AWD	★★★★☆	28.6.23	Short on premium refinement but meets its discreetly sporty brief well.	5.7	5.3	1784	32.2	-

ALPINE

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A110 Première Edition	★★★★★	16.5.18	Hilarious fun delivered in effusive and accessible fashion.	4.7	3.8	1125	45.6	-
A110 Légende GT	★★★★⯪	9.3.22	The best fast A110 we've seen but not quite the definitive version.	4.8	3.9	1140	40.2	-
A110 R	★★★⯪☆	15.11.23	Hardcore A110 has its lures but probably not enough of them for its price.	4.2	3.5	1094	39.7	-

ARIEL

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Atom 4	★★★★★	9.10.19	Track-slayer is unrivalled for built-in quality and dynamic character.	3.2	2.4	680	39.2	-

ASTON MARTIN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Vantage	★★★★⯪	18.9.24	Baby Aston grows up to spectacular effect. A machine of stunning breadth and likeability.	3.5	2.6	1745	28.5	-
DBS Superleggera	★★★★★	21.11.18	Effortlessly fast and intoxicating to drive, the big Aston is better than ever.	3.7	2.7	1910	25.6	-
Vanquish	★★★★⯪	26.3.25	Aston's blown V12 lives on in a devastatingly effective super-GT.	3.1	2.3	1951	25.8	-
DBX 707	★★★★☆	30.11.22	A better DBX to drive, but still leaves room for improvement.	3.3	2.8	2278	26.2	-

AUDI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A1 Sportback 35 TFSI S Line Style Edition	★★★⯪☆	2.10.19	Luxury supermini lacks the polish to justify its high price.	7.9	8.4	1209	57.0	-
S3 Sportback	★★★⯪☆	18.11.20	Audi delivers an effective if somewhat unlovable hot hatch.	4.8	4.2	1552	39.0	-
RS4 Avant	★★★★☆	14.2.18	A hot estate that oozes class but is curiously short on charisma.	4.0	3.5	1790	36.7	-
S5 Launch Edition	★★★★☆	15.1.25	Rounded sports saloon with a characterful V6 and new-found dose of driver appeal.	4.1	3.8	2027	33.7	-
A6 50 TFSIe Quattro S Line	★★★★☆	5.1.22	Hybrid tech boosts saloon's refinement, charm and running credentials.	5.7	5.2	2077	45.4	34
S6 E-tron Avant Launch Edition	★★★⯪☆	16.4.25	Strong technical showing is undermined by price and lack of discernible character.	3.7	2.9	2346	2.8	256
RS6 Avant GT	★★★★☆	5.2.25	Retro visual charm meets unprecedented dynamism in big-hearted estate.	3.2	2.7	2144	26.3	–
A7 Sportback 50 TDI Quattro Sport	★★★⯪☆	11.7.18	Easy on the eye and to live with but let down by stolid dynamics.	5.8	5.3	1880	53.1	-
A8 L 60 TFSIe Quattro Sport	★★★⯪☆	17.6.20	Technically impressive but not as cosseting as a limo ought to be.	-	-	2330	-	-
E-tron 55 Quattro	★★★★⯪	26.6.19	A rounded, uber-luxurious addition to the premium EV niche.	5.4	4.2	2569	-	218
E-tron S Quattro	★★★⯪☆	2.6.21	A slick, tech-laden luxury operator but no dynamic landmark for EVs.	4.2	3.6	2643	-	-
Q2 1.4 TFSI Sport	★★★⯪☆	9.11.16	Fit for purpose but a less compelling option than it might have been.	8.1	8.2	1316	-	-
SQ2 Quattro S Tronic	★★★★☆	20.3.19	More fun than you might expect from a crossover or an Audi S model.	4.5	4.1	1530	34.5	-
Q4 E-tron 40 Sport	★★★⯪☆	7.7.21	Practical, pleasant and efficient but not a superior premium product.	8.1	7.8	2112	-	-
Q5 TDI Quattro 204PS S Line	★★★⯪☆	14.5.25	Pleasant and competitive but no particular step forward.	6.7	7.1	2072	42.6	-
Q6 E-tron Quattro Edition 1	★★★⯪☆	2.10.24	EV is hard to love, easier to recommend, with good dynamics and strong EV credentials.	5.3	4.3	–	2.8	247
Q7 3.0 TDI Quattro S Line	★★★★☆	12.8.15	Plush, suave and spacious but so-so to drive.	6.2	6.2	2245	-	-
SQ7 4.0 TDI Quattro	★★★★⯪	26.10.16	A class-topping blend of superlative comfort and usable performance.	5.1	4.5	2330	37.9	-
Q8 50 TDI S Line	★★★★☆	26.9.18	Striking and effective SUV-coupé leaves us wanting more.	6.9	6.7	2285	40.1	-
R8 V10 Plus	★★★★☆	30.12.15	Supercar grips and goes even harder but wants for its predecessor's delicacy.	3.1	2.6	1730	-	-
S E-tron GT	★★★★☆	2.4.25	Audi's super-EV holds great appeal in its purest form but isn't at the bleeding edge.	3.1	2.4	2361	2.8	262

BENTLEY

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Bentayga W12	★★★★⯪	18.5.16	Versatile, genteel, luxurious SUV with a silken sporting edge.	4.9	4.4	2440	-	-
Bentayga EWB Mulliner Blackline	★★★★☆	24.4.24	Stretched SUV lacks the Mulsanne limo's charm but is a better luxury car by far.	4.4	3.8	2600	25.6	-
Continental GT Speed	★★★★☆	22.12.21	Remains a wonderful grand tourer but can fall short as an entertainer.	3.4	2.7	2279	22.0	-
Continental GTC V8 S	★★★★⯪	19.4.23	Sporty V8 execution adds vivacity to a car that makes you feel good.	3.6	3.2	2295	29.1	-
Continental GT Speed Hybrid First Edition	★★★★☆	16.4.25	Electrons make fastest GT quicker but not necessarily better.	3.1	2.5	2462	28.0	47
Flying Spur W12	★★★★⯪	15.7.20	Trounces rivals for driver appeal but not in every way that matters.	3.9	3.2	2500	32.5	-

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Flying Spur Hybrid Mulliner ★★★★⯪ 17.8.22 Mightily convincing PHEV limo more than earns its Bentley wings.	4.4	3.9	2596	30.1	28

BMW

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
120 M Sport ★★★⯪☆ 31.12.24 Credible and complete junior BMW still lacks distinguishing driver appeal.	7.3	6.8	1489	45.8	-
218i M Sport Gran Coupé ★★★☆☆ 8.4.20 Junior Gran Coupé hits some high notes but fails to inspire.	8.8	8.4	1375	58.2	-
220i M Sport Coupé ★★★★☆ 1.6.22 A good coupé rather than a great sports car.	7.3	7.3	1546	46.8	-
M2 Coupé Manual ★★★★⯪ 12.7.23 Junior M car takes huge objective leaps but smaller subjective ones.	4.5	3.8	1687	32.1	-
320d M Sport Auto ★★★★★ 15.5.19 BMW's one-time default-choice executive saloon hits even greater heights.	6.9	6.8	1639	63.3	-
330d xDrive M Sport Plus Edition Touring ★★★★⯪ 15.1.20 An estate that's powerful, classy and great to drive – but with a price to match.	5.5	5.2	1922	52.6	-
330e M Sport ★★★★⯪ 1.7.20 Slicker and sweeter-handling than the average PHEV. A true 3 Series.	-	-	1740	-	-
M440i xDrive ★★★★☆ 6.1.21 A rounded, engaging and potent coupé let down only by its looks.	4.1	3.7	1775	44.0	-
M4 Competition ★★★★⯪ 21.4.21 A very modern M car and a brilliantly versatile and enjoyable one.	3.9	2.9	1800	32.7	-
M4 CS ★★★★☆ 23.4.25 Stunning performance and pace comes with costs that aren't so easy to justify.	2.9	2.5	1747	32.4	-
i4 M50 ★★★★☆ 19.1.22 Fast, refined and with lots of traditional appeal to convert sceptics.	4.1	3.2	2248	-	186
M4 CSL ★★★★☆ 16.11.22 A next-level M car, with the more complex temperament to match.	3.6	2.7	1625	31.1	-
M5 ★★★⯪☆ 29.1.25 A technical leap, but one born more out of necessity than inspiration.	3.5	2.8	2373	27.3	35
i5 eDrive40 M Sport Pro ★★★⯪☆ 29.11.23 Has dynamic appeal but less convincing than BMW's other EV saloons.	5.4	4.4	2213	-	235
550e xDrive M Sport Pro ★★★★☆ 3.4.24 Undeniably capable and a fine plug-in hybrid sports saloon.	4.4	3.5	2232	40.1	47
i7 xDrive60 M Sport ★★★★⯪ 15.2.23 It has taken huge strides as a luxury car – and still drives like a BMW.	4.5	3.4	2758	-	264
840d xDrive ★★★★☆ 16.1.19 A likeable big GT, albeit not the most luxurious or rewarding on sale.	5.0	4.6	1901	49.2	-
M8 Competition Convertible ★★★⯪☆ 5.2.20 Has attitude to spare but isn't the complete super-GT.	3.3	2.7	2020	31.6	-
M8 Competition ★★★⯪☆ 3.6.20 Highly capable but doesn't truly satisfy as either a sports car or a GT.	-	-	1960	-	-
X1 xDrive23i M Sport ★★★⯪☆ 25.1.23 A decent family crossover but a poor BMW.	6.4	6.0	1800	45.6	-
X4 M Competition ★★★☆☆ 13.11.19 Fast and precise, if short on the big-time charisma that you would expect.	4.0	3.3	2028	29.0	-
X5 xDrive30d M Sport ★★★★☆ 2.1.19 Better to drive than the SUV norm but not better across the board.	6.6	6.6	2279	43.1	-
X6 M Competition ★★★☆☆ 20.3.24 Unyielding performance focus makes for a fast but compromised SUV.	3.5	3.1	2442	29.3	-
X7 M60i xDrive ★★★★☆ 29.3.23 Uncompromising-looking X7 is seriously fast but laudably refined.	4.2	3.7	2600	28.9	-
iX xDrive50 M Sport ★★★★⯪ 2.3.22 Takes the luxury EV to elevated heights, but its design is easy to criticise.	4.4	3.4	2593	-	252
Z4 M40i with Handschalter Pack ★★★★☆ 21.8.24 Manual gearbox gives six-year-old roadster new depth.	5.7	5.9	1561	36.9	-

BMW ALPINA

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
B3 GT Touring ★★★★⯪ 15.1.25 Last-dance B3 has mighty breadth and will go down as one of the all-time greats.	3.3	2.7	1910	29.4	-
B8 Gran Coupé ★★★★☆ 22.9.21 Superbly rounded but lacking some dynamism implied by its looks.	3.5	2.8	2100	-	-

BYD

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Atto 3 Design ★★★☆☆ 31.5.23 Lack of attention to detail detracts from the impressive battery tech.	7.0	6.2	1787	-	201
Seal Design ★★★⯪☆ 17.1.24 Frustrating software lets down the mostly impressive hardware.	5.8	4.7	2116	-	279

CATERHAM

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Seven 160 ★★★★☆ 20.11.13 Fun entry-level version of B-road toy smacks just a little of compromise.	8.4	8.7	510	44.8	-
Seven 620S ★★★★⯪ 9.3.16 Supplies fun intravenously with a mix of freneticism and road-going usability.	3.8	4.2	650	29.5	-
Seven 420 Cup ★★★★⯪ 31.8.22 Track-day variant serves up sensational driving thrills – for a price.	4.2	3.4	560	35.3	-

CHEVROLET

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Corvette 3LT ★★★★☆ 22.6.22 Big step up for charismatic, usable and temptingly priced American icon.	3.9	3.2	1679	32.9	-
Corvette Z06 3LZ ★★★★☆ 16.8.23 Incredible engine and chassis makeover, but the price has to be right.	3.1	2.4	1670	26.1	-

CITROEN

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ami Colour ★★⯪☆☆ 11.1.23 Cleverly conceived but hard to recommend, given its limited capabilities.	-	-	471	-	39
ë-C3 Max ★★★⯪☆ 30.4.25 Predictable limitations but also plenty of usability, space and cheer for the money.	10.7	10.3	1479	2.8	-
C3 Aircross Puretech 110 Flair ★★★⯪☆ 7.3.18 Practical small crossover isn't outstanding to drive but is likeable nonetheless.	11.5	10.7	1159	39.5	-
C4 Puretech 130 Shine Plus Auto ★★★☆☆ 26.5.21 Has rational and irrational appeal but lacks a fine-tuned execution.	9.5	9.2	1320	56.4	-
ë-C4 X Shine ★★★⯪☆ 3.5.23 EV motoring done differently, with value, but its successes are qualified.	9.7	8.8	1623	-	162
C5 Aircross BlueHDi 180 Flair Plus ★★★⯪☆ 13.2.19 Attractive and interesting, although its style is better than its substance.	9.0	8.5	1540	47.8	-
C5 X Puretech 180 Shine Plus ★★★★☆ 28.9.22 Good value and comfy, this is the kind of car that Citroën should be making.	7.8	7.1	1502	47.8	-

CUPRA

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Born 204PS 58kWh V3 ★★★⯪☆ 6.7.22 As good as the family hatchback EV class gets in places but not as good as it could be.	6.7	6.2	1794	-	220
Born VZ First Edition ★★★★☆ 9.10.24 An already fine electric car's driver appeal is lifted but not transformed.	5.4	4.2	1996	3.5	269
Leon Estate 310PS VZ3 ★★★★☆ 8.9.21 Fiercely quick and dependable but pulls the heartstrings only lightly.	4.9	4.3	1707	40.1	-
Leon 2.0 TSI 245PS VZ2 ★★★★☆ 27.7.22 Brilliantly rounded hot hatch shines in its simplest spec.	5.9	4.7	1468	43.4	-
Ateca 2.0 TSI 4Drive DSG ★★★⯪☆ 23.1.19 Hot crossover is objectively impressive but lacks true driver reward.	4.9	4.4	1615	36.7	-
Formentor 2.0 TSI 4Drive VZ2 DSG ★★★★⯪ 3.2.21 Versatile, interesting, rewarding. One of the best fast crossovers yet.	5.1	4.3	1583	36.4	-
Tavascan V1 ★★★☆☆ 5.2.25 Electric SUV is competent but not very compelling or memorable.	6.0	5.0	2129	3.2	246

DACIA

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Sandero Stepway TCe 90 Prestige ★★★★☆ 28.4.21 Cut-price crossover is compromised in surprisingly few areas.	11.9	11.9	1096	54.1	-
Duster Hybrid 140 Journey ★★★★⯪ 27.11.24 Notably improved yet barely any pricier.	9.7	8.7	1413	40.2	-
Jogger TCe 110 Comfort ★★★★⯪ 20.4.22 Superb versatility, outstanding value and so likeable with it.	11.0	11.0	1267	48.5	-

DS

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3 Crossback Puretech 155 Prestige ★★★☆☆ 10.7.19 No design smash hit. Short on perceived quality and dynamic polish.	8.8	8.3	1205	48.6	-
4 E-Tense 225 Performance Line+ ★★★⯪☆ 29.6.22 High price and a list of niggles keep this family hatchback away from the top.	7.4	6.0	1706	44.7	26
7 Crossback Puretech 225 Prestige ★★★⯪☆ 19.9.18 DS's first SUV is a competent but slightly bland addition to the class.	8.6	7.0	1616	44.6	-
7 E-Tense 4x4 360 La Première ★★★⯪☆ 26.4.23 More focused and makes subtle gains, but its powertrain and ride frustrate.	5.7	4.6	1956	36.6	29
9 E-Tense 225 Performance Line Plus ★★★⯪☆ 2.2.22 Posh saloon is alternative and devoted to its luxury remit but no show-stopper.	8.6	7.1	1886	44.7	20

FERRARI

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
296 GTB ★★★★★ 21.12.22 Stellar modern-era Ferrari supercar has an unrivalled breadth of talent.	2.7	1.9	1648	37.8	15
SF90 Stradale ★★★★☆ 3.11.21 Sets the performance benchmark but isn't a track-handling great.	2.5	1.8	1698	24.4	16

FIAT

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
500 Twinair Lounge ★★★⯪☆ 24.11.10 Characterful and stylish, but its real-world economy lets it down.	11.7	13.0	1070	42.1	-
500C 1.2 Pop ★★★★☆ 5.8.09 Landaulet hits the spot every bit as well as the regular hatchback and is often better.	13.2	14.4	1035	48.3	-
500e 42kWh Icon ★★★★☆ 26.1.22 More than just an electric city car and a welcome return to form.	8.1	7.7	1365	-	142
600e La Prima ★★★⯪☆ 27.3.24 Electric crossover is decent value and easy to drive but otherwise a bit easy to overlook.	8.8	7.7	1587	-	173

FORD

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Fiesta 1.0 Ecoboost 125PS Titanium ★★★★⯪ 9.8.17 A dynamically brilliant supermini but no longer the best one.	6.6	7.8	1218	48.2	-

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Fiesta ST	★★★★⯪	15.8.18	Great to drive and supreme value but not better than before in all aspects.	6.6	7.8	1218	48.2	-
Focus 1.5 Ecoboost 182PS ST-Line X	★★★★⯪	20.2.19	Better to drive and look at than before and impressively good value.	8.9	7.8	1417	43.8	-
Focus ST	★★★★☆	11.9.19	Big on character and performance but not quite truly immersive.	6.1	4.9	1433	40.7	-
Puma 1.0T 125PS MHEV Titanium	★★★★⯪	25.3.20	The driver's car the compact crossover class has been crying out for and more besides.	10.0	9.6	1260	50.0	-
Puma ST	★★★★☆	24.3.21	Well judged, versatile and fun. The jacked-up hot hatch done well.	7.2	6.2	1301	41.5	-
Explorer Extended Range Premium RWD	★★★⯪☆	23.10.24	Electric family crossover is better to drive than rivals, but at a cost.	5.8	4.8	2067	2.9	262
Kuga 2.5 PHEV ST-Line	★★★⯪☆	24.6.20	Good value and potentially frugal, but this SUV has more to give.	-	-	1844	-	-
Mustang Mach-E Extended Range RWD	★★★★☆	23.6.21	Worthy of the name? Perhaps not, but it's still impressive and likeable.	6.8	5.6	2130	-	-
Mustang Mach-E GT AWD	★★★☆☆	27.4.22	Has its moments but lacks the dynamism of a typical fast Ford.	4.2	3.5	2298	-	-
Mustang Dark Horse	★★★⯪☆	20.11.24	Brimming with character but more compromised than many of its forebears.	4.5	3.5	1853	26.1	-
Tourneo Courier 1.0 Ecoboost Titanium	★★★⯪☆	10.7.24	Has some Ford-typical star quality but not enough for the money.	10.8	10.6	1426	47.4	-
Transit Custom L2H1 320 2.0 EcoBlue 150PS Limited	★★★★☆	8.5.24	Likely to remain the default commercial vehicle, despite a high price.	12.1	11.8	1971	38.8	-
Ranger 2.0TD EcoBlue 205PS Wildtrak	★★★★⯪	14.6.23	Pick-up truck is practical, car-like to drive and generally hard to fault.	9.8	9.9	2348	36.6	-
F-150 Lightning Platinum	★★★⯪☆	17.5.23	Electric truck has huge utility and appealing range, but its size and price will put many off.	4.5	3.7	3121	-	288

GENESIS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
G70 2.2 CRDi Luxury Line	★★★⯪☆	10.11.21	Likeable left-field choice struggles to threaten the establishment.	7.2	6.7	1751	60.4	-
Electrified G80	★★★⯪☆	12.10.22	Electric limo doesn't quite hit the mark like its Kia and Hyundai platform-mates.	4.4	4.0	2349	-	272
GV60 Sport Plus	★★★★☆	24.8.22	Handsome, fast, sophisticated electric crossover is the best Genesis yet.	3.8	3.1	2192	-	220
GV80 3.0D Luxury 5-Seater	★★★⯪☆	15.9.21	Rich, spacious and comfortable but not a world-class luxury SUV yet.	6.7	6.6	2217	45.0	-

GWM ORA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Funky Cat 48kWh First Edition	★★⯪☆☆	1.2.23	Electric hatch is decent value and has funky looks but is a mediocre experience overall.	7.7	7.2	1580	-	154

HONDA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
E Advance	★★★⯪☆	26.8.20	More than just a pretty face in the EV crowd but its limited range is an issue.	7.9	-	1535	-	110
Jazz 1.5 i-MMD Hybrid EX	★★★⯪☆	7.10.20	Eminently practical, impressively frugal and pretty joyless to drive.	9.6	10.0	1248	57.0	-
Civic Type R GT	★★★★⯪	25.10.17	Hot hatch is a sheer delight for enthusiast drivers and their bank balances.	5.7	7.1	1400	57.0	-
HR-V e:HEV Advance Style	★★★⯪☆	24.11.21	Fine ergonomics and big on superficial charm but leaves us cold.	9.2	9.3	1397	43.2	-
e:Ny1 Advance	★★★☆☆	1.11.23	EV is charming in some ways but has too little substance to justify the price.	8.6	6.9	1756	-	211

HYUNDAI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
i10 1.2 MPi Premium	★★★★☆	15.4.20	Smallest Hyundai regains leadership of the city car class.	12.3	12.9	999	52.5	-
i20 1.0 T-GDi 100 48V SE Connect	★★★⯪☆	24.2.21	Steady gains for a versatile runabout still lacking some personality.	9.7	10.1	1065	63.5	-
i20 N	★★★★⯪	25.8.21	N division's finest car to date. A serious hot hatch with real dynamic polish.	6.1	5.4	1231	50.6	-
i30 Tourer 1.4 T-GDi Premium SE	★★★⯪☆	13.9.17	Competent, servile, inoffensive-looking family estate offers little to like or dislike.	9.5	9.7	1425	48.9	-
i30 N Performance	★★★⯪☆	28.12.17	Hyundai's first hot hatch attempt is fast and full-blooded with rough edges.	6.4	5.6	1478	43.1	-
Ioniq 6 RWD Ultimate	★★★⯪☆	7.6.23	Usable, rangy and innovative EV let down by cabin packaging and ride.	7.2	6.2	2006	-	272
Kona 1.0 120PS Advance	★★★★☆	6.9.23	Hyundai brings some cheer, value and space to the compact crossover class.	10.4	10.3	1352	50.4	-
Tucson 1.6 T-GDi Hybrid Premium	★★★★☆	17.3.21	Tucson shows that Hyundai can do both style and substance.	7.6	6.2	1612	47.7	-
Ioniq 5 N	★★★★★	7.8.24	A little big and heavy, but compelling like no other EV to date.	3.5	2.7	2221	-	224
Santa Fe Hybrid 4WD Premium	★★★★☆	16.10.24	A superb lounge on wheels, but let down by its powertrain.	7.9	7.5	2007	32.9	-
Nexo	★★★⯪☆	12.6.19	Impressive effort that heads in the right direction for hydrogen fuel cell cars.	9.6	9.7	1852	-	-

INEOS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Grenadier 3.0 T Fieldmaster	★★★⯪☆	20.9.23	Unquestionably a serious proposition but maybe lacking in innovation.	8.0	8.1	2682	20.9	-

JAECOO

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
7 SHS 2WD Luxury	★★⯪☆☆	9.4.25	Chinese PHEV SUV is efficient and keenly priced but has too many usability flaws.	7.3	6.4	1814	35.0	41

JAGUAR

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
XE 2.0 200PS R-Sport	★★★★⯪	1.7.15	Junior saloon hits the spot, matching the best of its German rivals at their own game.	7.6	6.7	1530	48.7	-
XF Sportbrake 300PS R-Sport AWD	★★★⯪☆	17.4.19	Estate is built on enthusiast values but in need of a wider update.	6.6	6.2	1727	36.8	-
E-Pace D180 AWD SE	★★★⯪☆	11.4.18	Misses the mark for keen drivers but is a desirable SUV nevertheless.	9.9	10.5	1768	49.2	-
I-Pace EV400 S	★★★★⯪	12.9.18	Jaguar's landmark car strikes a heavy blow to Tesla's luxury EV monopoly.	4.5	3.5	2236	-	-
F-Pace SVR	★★★★⯪	24.7.19	Broad-batted and can vividly thrill but hasn't forgotten its SUV roots.	4.1	3.5	2070	29.4	-
F-Pace 400e R-Dynamic HSE	★★★★⯪	1.12.21	Facelift hits the mark. Electrification is a mixed but creditable success.	5.1	4.6	2264	-	24
F-Type P575 R AWD Coupé	★★★★☆	29.4.20	The same likeable bruiser behind those prettier features.	-	-	1743	-	-

JEEP

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Avenger Electric Summit	★★★⯪☆	24.1.24	Not perfect but successfully takes Jeep in a fresh direction.	8.3	6.9	1601	-	172
Compass 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited	★★★⯪☆	3.10.18	Pricey, pokey, gruff Jeep is a long shot for SUV market success.	11.0	11.5	1540	44.8	-
Compass 4xe S	★★★☆☆	16.2.22	Not without niche appeal but off the pace in too many respects.	6.4	5.7	1872	46.9	22
Renegade 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited	★★★⯪☆	28.10.15	Charmingly authentic but also pricey and rather rough and ready.	10.8	11.2	1502	52.6	-
Renegade 4xe Trailhawk	★★★☆☆	30.6.21	Electrified Jeep has some charm but is typically rough and ready.	6.7	5.6	1816	39.4	21
Wrangler 2.2 Multijet II Overland	★★★★☆	10.4.19	Off-road icon is now more competent on it.	9.0	9.1	2122	37.6	-

KGM

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Tivoli XLV ELX Auto	★★★☆☆	14.9.16	Practical, well-priced crossover is competent but far from compelling.	12.0	12.6	1469	-	-

KIA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Picanto 1.0 MPI 2	★★★⯪☆	11.9.24	No great advance for the breed but likeable, capable and still here.	13.4	13.9	985	51.4	-

TOP 3

BEST DRIVER'S CARS

1 McLaren Artura

2 Analogue Supersport

3 Aston Martin Vantage

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

Road tests revisited

1985 MITSUBISHI STARION TURBO

Japanese brand upgrades its impressive sports coupé with a sleeker look and extra power. "There is a certain charm in its relative primitiveness, a rough edge that makes it perhaps just that little more exciting than the rest."

Price £13,376
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1997cc, turbo, petrol
Power 177bhp at 6000rpm
Torque 214lb ft at 3500rpm
Weight 1368kg
0-60mph 6.6sec
0-100mph 18.0sec
Top speed 140mph
Economy 20.6mpg

1961 DAIMLER MAJESTIC MAJOR

Even more luxurious and slightly longer version of 1958's Majestic – the British brand's "best car for many years" – heralds a big new V8. "Appeals almost as a sports saloon to the driver with a large family. May equally well be used as a chauffeur-driven limo."

Price £2995
Engine V8, 4561cc, petrol
Power 220bhp at 5500rpm
Torque 283lb ft at 3200rpm
Weight 2070kg
0-60mph 10.3sec
0-100mph 30.9sec
Top speed 120mph
Economy 14.8mpg

READ FULL ROAD TEST FOR FREE*

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ceed 1.6 CRDi 115bhp 2	★★★★☆	29.8.18	Big step up in the family hatchback class is a watershed moment for Kia.	9.9	9.6	1411	70.3	-
Proceed 1.4 T-GDi GT-Line S	★★★½☆	27.2.19	Alluring and interesting but not quite as special to drive as it looks.	9.5	8.9	1475	42.6	-
Xceed 1.4 T-GDi First Edition	★★★½☆	20.11.19	Looks good and drives well but lacks some practicality and polish.	9.3	8.7	1452	46.8	-
Soul EV Urban	★★★½☆	5.7.23	Not actually that cheap but likeable and complete.	8.0	8.3	1569	-	147
Niro EV 3	★★★★☆	7.9.22	A good family EV made better, despite some missed opportunities.	6.9	5.6	1739	-	246
EV3 81.4kWh GT-Line	★★★★☆	31.12.24	New-era Niro is rationally compelling but not a game-changer.	7.2	6.4	1858	2.6	265
Sportage 1.6 HEV 2WD GT-Line S	★★★½☆	15.6.22	Bold family SUV catches the eye but won't hold your interest to drive.	7.3	6.4	1658	44.8	-
EV6 77.4kWh RWD GT-Line S	★★★★☆	9.10.24	Not the outstanding EV it once was but still a likeably bold choice.	7.5	6.3	–	2.9	227
EV6 GT	★★★½☆	4.10.23	Lots of pace and usability for the money but not enough driver appeal.	3.6	2.7	2161	-	209
Sorento 1.6 HEV T-GDi AWD 2	★★★½☆	20.1.21	Lacks polish, but its abundant utility appeal and value shine through.	8.5	7.9	2006	43.3	-
EV9 GT-Line S	★★★★☆	31.1.24	Style, space, versatility and range for a more reasonable price than rivals.	5.1	4.6	2660	-	220

LAMBORGHINI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Huracán Performante	★★★★½	11.10.17	Breathtaking track makeover brings it close to greatness.	2.9	2.0	1590	22.4	-
Huracán Evo RWD	★★★★½	20.5.20	Finest driver's car Lamborghini makes is also the most attainable.	-	-	1389	-	-
Revuelto	★★★★½	4.12.24	New-era V12 Lamborghini is an extraordinary statement of intent.	2.5	1.7	1960	24.1	6
Urus	★★★★☆	3.7.19	Italy's latest 'mostro' has a driving experience to blow your mind.	3.3	2.8	2285	28.5	-

LAND ROVER

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Range Rover Evoque P300e R-Dynamic HSE	★★★★½	10.2.21	A better plug-in compact SUV. Expensive but slick and luxurious.	6.8	5.9	2158	32.7	24
Discovery Sport D180 AWD SE	★★★★☆	8.1.20	Off-road fidelity and character outweigh a lacklustre powertrain.	10.3	10.5	2145	47.5	-
Discovery TD6 HSE Luxury	★★★★½	12.4.17	A proper Land Rover, modernised, refined and as likeable as ever.	8.7	8.8	2230	-	-
Range Rover Velar D240 HSE	★★★½☆	30.8.17	Stylish, advanced and accomplished but in need of a better powertrain.	9.3	9.0	2089	48.2	-
Defender 110 P400 X	★★★★½	13.5.20	World-class capability. Brilliant on and off road – at a price.	-	-	2388	-	-
Defender 110 P635 Octa Edition 1	★★★★½	30.4.25	Outrageous, unnecessary and totally awe-inspiring.	4.6	3.7	2717	22.1	-
Range Rover Sport D300 Dynamic SE	★★★★½	2.11.22	Deeply appealing and deeply accomplished, with a price to match.	7.2	6.6	2511	42.5	-
Range Rover Sport SV Edition One	★★★½☆	28.8.24	More capable than most rivals, but others are more compelling.	3.9	5.1	2546	28.9	-
Range Rover D350 HSE	★★★★½	13.7.22	A fantastically well-isolated luxury car and fully paid-up capable 4x4.	6.3	6.0	2667	35.9	-
Range Rover P550e Autobiography	★★★★☆	9.4.25	A unique and enthralling character that brings added refinement in PHEV form.	4.9	4.0	2979	26.6	44

LEXUS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
LBX FWD Premium Plus Design	★★★½☆	29.5.24	Crossover convinces as a small premium car, but only just.	8.4	8.4	1306	45.2	-
NX 350h AWD Premium Plus Pack	★★★★☆	16.3.22	Interesting, refined and efficient, but not as polished as the best.	7.1	6.7	1812	44.7	-
RX 500h F Sport	★★★½☆	22.3.23	Classy and luxurious, but that might not be enough for keener drivers.	6.1	5.5	2088	31.7	-
ES 300h Takumi	★★★½☆	6.2.19	Boldly styled, economical saloon has a singularly rational but dry character.	8.7	7.6	1742	48.8	-
RC F Ultimate Edition	★★★½☆	6.11.24	Bellows in some ways, whispers in others. A little flawed but never dull or boring.	4.7	3.8	1733	30.1	-
LM 350h AWD Takumi	★★★☆☆	7.2.24	MPV is a fascinating luxury-market curio but no threat to the old-school limo.	8.6	8.2	2368	40.5	-

LOTUS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Emira V6 First Edition	★★★★½	2.4.25	The British sports car is alive, well and expensive.	4.4	4.0	1493	29.0	–
Eletre R	★★★½☆	24.7.24	There's plenty to like about the new Lotus but little sign of the old Lotus.	3.1	2.2	2682	-	216

MASERATI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ghibli Diesel	★★★½☆	12.3.14	Saloon isn't lacking in style but is a little short on substance.	6.5	6.0	2040	40.4	-
Grecale Trofeo	★★★½☆	18.10.23	A belting engine but high-priced and not the best-driving Grecale.	3.6	3.2	2097	33.6	-
Levante Diesel	★★★☆☆	30.11.16	A mildly interesting also-ran, with a weak engine and so-so handling.	6.8	6.9	2205	41.5	-
Levante S Granlusso	★★★½☆	8.5.19	Better engine improves the class's curate's egg but can't redeem it.	5.1	4.5	2232	23.7	-
Granturismo Trofeo	★★★½☆	11.9.24	An appealing grand tourer that lacks some sophistication for the price.	3.6	3.1	-	33.0	-
Granturismo Folgore	★★★½☆	26.2.25	Assured and likeable but could only ever be bought with the heart – even sans V8.	2.9	2.3	2358	2.3	183
MC20 Cielo	★★★★☆	16.10.24	Dynamic iconoclast, old-school charmer, occasional GT. A unique supercar.	4.0	2.8	1783	29.6	-

MAZDA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
2 1.5 Skyactiv-G 90PS SE-L Nav	★★★★☆	22.4.15	The go-to option for keen drivers is also a convincing all-rounder.	10.4	11.0	1050	-	-
3 2.0 Skyactiv-X 181PS GT Sport	★★★★☆	6.11.19	Sweet to drive and great to behold, but the Skyactiv-X engine is no knockout.	9.1	9.1	1425	57.0	-
MX-30 145PS GT Sport Tech	★★★½☆	10.3.21	Has smart looks and a plush interior, but the first Mazda EV deserved more.	9.1	8.6	1663	-	-
CX-30 2.5 e-Skyactiv G Exclusive-Line	★★★★☆	19.2.25	Alternative powertrain is a credit to this voluble, unconventional compact SUV.	7.6	7.6	1422	45.2	-
CX-5 2.2D 150PS 2WD Sport Nav	★★★★☆	28.6.17	Still moderately left of field but now likeable in greater proportions.	9.4	9.2	1620	53.9	-
CX-60 e-Skyactiv D 3.3 RWD Exclusive-Line	★★★½☆	10.5.23	Old-school in all the best ways, but the ride is difficult to overlook.	7.6	7.2	1893	52.3	-
MX-5 1.5 SE-L Nav	★★★★½	2.9.15	An outstanding and usable sports car at an outstanding price.	8.4	7.9	1050	-	-

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*For three weeks from publication date

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

McLAREN

720S ★★★★★ 24.5.17
Sufficiently complete and exciting to dominate rivals and hugely fast.
2.9 2.0 1419 24.2 -

750S ★★★★☆ 19.6.24
McLaren's mainstay is a bit of a wild child – at times, to its own cost.
2.9 2.0 1412 28.8 -

Artura ★★★★½ 19.10.22
Brilliantly packaged, invitingly poised and wise use of electrification.
3.2 2.1 1552 32.9 17

Artura Spider ★★★★½ 6.11.24
Artura finds extra form in convertible guise.
3.1 2.2 1618 27.2 17

GT ★★★½☆ 27.1.21
Plenty of pace and purity, less GT-typical usability and refinement.
3.3 2.3 1580 34.2

MERCEDES-AMG

A45 S 4Matic+ Plus ★★★★½ 4.3.20
AMG brings its hottest hatch yet to life without harming usability.
4.1 3.3 1661 41.5 -

C63 S E Performance 4Matic+ Night Edition Premium Plus Estate
★★★☆☆ 31.7.24
Fascinating engineering feat falls flat as an exciting super-estate.
3.3 2.8 2217 27.1 7.1

GT 63 4Matic+ 4-Door Coupé
★★★★½ 13.3.19
AMG defies physics with a four-door GT that handles beautifully.
3.3 2.7 2135 30.1 -

GT 63 S E Performance 4-Door Coupé
★★★½☆ 21.6.23
Rocket-ship GT with astonishing powertrain but still lacks driver reward.
2.9 2.5 2339 23.9 6

EQS 53 4Matic+ Night Edition
★★★★☆ 8.6.22
Good but doesn't quite live up to its spectacular on-paper potential.
3.6 2.8 2673 - 259

S63 E Performance Night Edition
★★★★☆ 2.10.24
Prodigiously quick, confoundingly slick in its handling, but has a coarseness to it.
3.5 2.7 2666 26.1 -

GLE 53 4Matic+ Premium Plus
★★★½☆ 14.10.20
Remarkable dynamic versatility but lacks some driver appeal.
5.4 4.9 2471 29.4 -

SL 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus
★★★½☆ 26.7.23
Stonking V8 doesn't quite redeem a car of as many sacrifices as gains.
3.5 2.8 1939 26.2 -

GT 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus Coupé
★★★½☆ 14.8.24
Fearsomely quick and truly usable but less lovable than before.
3.1 2.7 1972 30.7 -

MERCEDES-BENZ

A200 AMG Line Executive
★★★★☆ 24.5.23
Significant progress for a keen-handling and efficient premium hatch.
7.8 7.3 1396 59.3 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

A250e AMG Line Premium
★★★☆☆ 5.8.20
Falls some way short of a rounded 'premium' driving experience.
6.7 5.4 1665 57.8 -

B180 Sport ★★★★☆ 3.4.19
In an ever-shrinking niche, this compact MPV deserves consideration.
8.4 8.3 1405 51.3 -

CLA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus
★★★☆☆ 21.8.19
Nearer the mark to look at but still way wide of it as a driver's car.
6.8 6.1 1555 48.3 -

C300e AMG Line ★★★★½ 4.5.22
Long-range hybrid tech gives C-Class an outstanding selling point.
5.8 5.1 2005 49.0 48

E220d AMG Line Premium Plus
★★★★☆ 3.1.24
An effective blend of convention, comfort, luxury and modernity.
7.2 5.9 1917 65.8 -

E450d Estate Exclusive Premium Plus
★★★★½ 19.3.25
Big-hearted diesel has speed, space and opulence. The only car you would ever need.
4.9 4.3 2167 46.1 -

EQE 350+ AMG Line Premium Plus
★★★½☆ 4.1.23
Hot on comfort and tech but lacklustre on range, material quality and space.
6.0 5.5 2386 - 262

EQS 450+ Business Class
★★★★☆ 7.5.25
Progress has been made, but this limousine still isn't quite the ultimate luxury EV.
5.9 4.9 2608 2.6 248

EQS 450 Business Class SUV
★★★½☆ 6.3.24
Ultra-luxurious seven-seater strays confusingly into MPV territory.
5.5 5.2 2899 - 265

S580e L AMG Line Premium Plus Executive ★★★★½ 6.4.22
Plug-in S-Class is the best of an otherwise ordinary generation.
5.2 4.2 2530 37.0 45

EQA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus
★★★☆☆ 17.11.21
Competent but entirely average. For the money, we expect better.
8.4 7.6 2030 - 200

GLB 220d 4Matic AMG Line Premium
★★★½☆ 16.9.20
Smart looking and practical but its identity feels stretched at times.
7.4 7.1 1810 55.4 -

EQB 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium
★★★½☆ 18.5.22
A versatile premium EV that doesn't easily command its premium.
7.7 6.8 2235 - -

GLC 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium Plus ★★★½☆ 13.9.23
Shines in places but doesn't notably elevate the GLC proposition.
6.5 6.0 1929 41.2 -

GLS 400d 4Matic AMG Line Premium
★★★½☆ 12.2.20
Has much to commend it but not enough to be the S-Class of SUVs.
6.5 6.0 2634 38.2 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

G350d AMG Line ★★★★☆ 17.7.19
Customary capability, charm and ego, now with 21st-century luxury.
7.5 7.2 2451 31.3 -

G500 AMG Line Premium Plus
★★★★☆ 25.9.24
Anachronistic, iconoclastic and expensive but very hard not to love.
5.1 4.5 - 30.7 -

CLE 300e AMG Line Premium Plus Coupé ★★★★☆ 13.11.24
Electrification brings traditional Merc strengths to a desirable mid-sized coupé.
6.1 5.5 2122 37.1 49

MG

3 Hybrid+ Trophy ★★★½☆ 12.6.24
Good value and with no serious vices but still lacks a final layer of polish.
6.8 6.2 1311 47.9 -

4 EV Long Range SE ★★★★☆ 5.4.23
Good value, useful and fun to drive to boot.
7.1 6.1 1692 - 185

5 SW EV Exclusive ★★★½☆ 25.11.20
MG's second EV does cheap motoring much better than the first.
8.0 7.1 1538 - 161

ZS EV Exclusive ★★★☆☆ 4.12.19
Practical, affordable MG fails to truly move the game on.
8.9 8.0 1556 - 113

ZS Hybrid+ Trophy ★★★☆☆ 22.1.25
Roomier, cleverer and better-equipped than you would expect for the money.
7.6 6.6 1422 41.5 -

MINI

John Cooper Works
★★★★☆ 14.5.25
A proper hot hatch let down by a stiff ride and an impenetrable user interface.
5.8 4.5 1363 42.0 -

Countryman C Exclusive
★★★½☆ 17.4.24
Spacious but sends mixed messages on family-friendly refinement.
8.7 7.7 1618 46.9 -

Aceman SE Exclusive
★★★½☆ 8.1.25
Compact SUV has the usual Mini charm but limited extra grown-up appeal.
6.8 5.7 1756 3.1 162

MORGAN

Plus Four ★★★½☆ 12.8.20
Refreshing and fun in that true Morgan way but lacks a little polish.
5.1 4.3 1013 54.0 -

Plus Six ★★★★☆ 10.4.24
The individualist's sports car made better.
4.4 3.3 1188 37.2 -

Super 3 ★★★★½ 9.11.22
Adds some subtle modernity to the 3 Wheeler's endless giggles.
6.9 5.9 644 43.5 -

NISSAN

Juke 1.0 DIG-T 117 Tekna ★★★½☆ 29.1.20
Impressive in some respects but outstanding in few.
11.9 11.8 1256 46.0 -

Qashqai 1.3 DIG-T 158 Tekna
★★★★☆ 28.7.21
Ticks the important family car boxes but its powertrain frustrates.
10.0 9.3 1412 44.9 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

Ariya 87kWh Evolve ★★★½☆ 26.10.22
Surprisingly traditional and luxurious but not wholly successful.
8.2 6.4 2109 - -

X-Trail e-Power e-4orce AWD Tekna
★★★★☆ 22.2.23
Capable all-rounder that deals effortlessly with everyday life.
6.6 6.0 1947 33.8 -

OMODA

5 1.6 TGDI Comfort
★★½☆☆ 20.11.24
Chinese SUV has some promise as a purely rational buy but feels under-developed.
7.4 6.3 1474 38.2 -

PEUGEOT

e-208 Allure Premium
★★★★☆ 6.5.20
Stylish, drivable, usable, reasonably priced – and the best small EV
- - 1455 38.2 -

308 1.2T Puretech 130 GT ★★★★☆ 25.5.22
A reminder of the old Peugeot magic. Small, supple and a bit special.
9.5 9.2 1358 55.3 -

408 Hybrid 180 GT e-EAT8 ★★★★☆ 11.10.23
Novel Peugeot shows an alternative path for the family car.
8.2 7.3 1746 42.1 40

508 BlueHDi 180 S&S GT Auto
★★★★☆ 24.10.18
Stylish and likeable but lacking the polish of more premium rivals.
8.8 8.5 1671 52.0 -

TOP 3

BEST USED 4x4s

1 Jeep Cherokee (XJ)

2 Toyota Land Cruiser Amazon

3 Fiat Panda 4x4

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
508 SW Hybrid 225 S&S Allure e-EAT8 ★★★★☆ 8.7.20 This is a comfortable car that looks smart and feels classy.	-	-	1720	-	-
508 SW Hybrid4 PSE ★★★★☆ 5.5.21 Hits notable handling highs but feels less than sharp elsewhere.	5.7	4.7	1892	44.0	-
e-2008 GT Line ★★★½☆ 30.9.20 Cheaper versions impress; pricier ones won't worry class leaders.	9.5	8.9	1638	-	-
3008 1.6 BlueHDi 120 GT Line ★★★½☆ 18.1.17 In challenging company, the 3008 promises more than it delivers.	12.0	12.1	1300	53.2	-
e-3008 73kWh Allure ★★★½☆ 4.8.24 Electric family SUV is rich, handsome and refined but no technical tour de force.	8.5	7.1	2132	-	219
5008 Hybrid 136 GT ★★★☆☆ 12.2.25 Concept car style can't save the function-follows-form engineering.	9.9	9.4	1736	44.0	-
POLESTAR					
2 BST Edition 270 ★★★½☆ 12.4.23 A creditable attempt at electric car thrills, although not quite fully formed.	4.5	3.4	2161	-	188
3 Long Range Dual Motor Launch Edition ★★★★☆ 12.2.25 Electric SUV is spacious, attractive and enticing to drive - with a few lapses.	4.6	3.8	2610	2.3	235

TOP 3

BEST SMALL ELECTRIC CARS

1 Renault 5

2 Mini Cooper E

3 MG 4 EV

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
PORSCHE					
718 Boxster ★★★★½ 8.6.16 Better than ever objectively, but at the expense of vital subjective appeal.	5.4	4.3	1395	35.9	-
718 Cayman S ★★★★½ 10.8.16 Still the greatest sports coupé out there, even if it doesn't sound like it.	4.8	3.9	1430	-	-
718 Spyder ★★★★½ 1.4.20 Spyder's flat six rectifies most, if not quite all, of the 718's shortcomings.	4.3	3.5	1350	30.1	-
718 Cayman GT4 RS ★★★★★ 14.9.22 A feast of noise, revs, handling poise and thrills. Incredibly special.	3.9	3.0	1444	27.1	-
911 GT3 PDK ★★★★½ 11.8.21 Less versatile than some past GT3s but still spectacularly good.	3.4	2.7	1430	29.2	-
911 Turbo S ★★★★½ 10.8.22 Has a questionable raison d'être but is engaging and awesomely capable.	2.5	2.0	1640	36.3	-
911 Carrera T ★★★★☆ 30.8.23 Sharper 911 has a likeable simplicity but makes key compromises.	4.9	3.8	1456	39.1	-
911 GT3 RS ★★★★½ 22.11.23 Esoteric even by hardcore 911 standards but simply monumental.	3.2	2.5	1476	26.7	-
911 Dakar ★★★★☆ 10.1.24 Rally-raid-themed throwback charms like no other modern 911.	3.3	2.6	1660	36.0	-
911 S/T ★★★★★ 3.7.24 Porsche's GT division alters its recipe to deliver an all-time great.	3.7	2.6	1408	30.9	-
911 Carrera GTS ★★★★½ 5.3.25 Hybrid tech punts barnstorming Carrera into the supercar sphere.	2.8	2.6	1607	34.3	-
Macan Turbo ★★★★½ 4.6.14 Luxury SUV meets sports car in a compact, well-priced package.	4.7	4.3	2050	30.9	-
Macan Turbo Electric ★★★½☆ 19.2.25 Otherwise appealing EV is undone by chassis tech.	3.0	2.5	–	2.1	219
Cayenne S ★★★★½ 21.2.24 Rebooted Cayenne impresses and the charming V8 is our pick.	5.0	4.3	2256	28.8	-
Cayenne Turbo ★★★★☆ 5.9.18 As impressive as ever but not quite the driver's car it once was.	3.9	3.4	2307	31.5	-
Cayenne Turbo S E-Hybrid ★★★½☆ 27.5.20 Technically impressive but fails to make a convincing case for itself.	-	-	2490	-	-
Cayenne Turbo GT Coupé ★★★★☆ 20.7.22 Uncompromising rapid SUV is a bit of a monster – but a likeable one.	3.1	2.7	2251	26.1	-

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Panamera 4 E-Hybrid ★★★★☆ 22.1.25 Understated plug-in hybrid is a Swiss Army knife super-saloon.	3.8	2.4	2370	30.1	29
Taycan Turbo S ★★★★½ 30.10.24 Porsche deftly keeps its superb EV on the boil.	2.6	1.9	2356	2.7	233
RENAULT					
Clio TCe 100 Iconic ★★★★½ 27.11.19 Plusher, smoother, more mature. A car of substance as well as style.	11.6	10.9	1138	56.9	-
5 E-Tech Comfort Range Iconic Five ★★★★½ 12.3.25 Accomplished and well priced, the 5 changes the affordable EV game.	7.7	7.2	1461	3.1	166
Megane E-Tech Techno ★★★½☆ 23.11.22 Likeable and eye-catching, but rivals have moved the EV game on.	6.9	5.4	1688	-	198
Captur TCe 130 S-Edition EDC ★★★½☆ 18.3.20 Second-generation Captur should prove popular, but not with this powertrain.	9.4	9.2	1363	53.1	-
Arkana E-Tech Hybrid 145 S-Edition ★★★½☆ 13.10.21 Showy styling clothes an eminently sensible but unspectacular car.	11.0	10.1	1365	58.3	-
Scenic E-Tech Iconic Long Range ★★★★☆ 26.6.24 The Scenic finally conforms but does so with style and substance.	8.1	6.3	1916	-	313
Austral E-Tech Iconic Esprit Alpine ★★★½☆ 19.7.23 Clever hybrid and pleasant cabin but let down by clumsy dynamics.	8.5	6.9	1696	43.5	-
ROLLS-ROYCE					
Ghost ★★★★½ 13.1.21 Most technologically advanced Rolls-Royce is an exceptional limo.	4.7	3.8	2490	28.5	-
Phantom ★★★★★ 4.4.18 The world's greatest and finest luxury car is now also the very best.	5.5	4.4	2780	28.4	-
Spectre ★★★★½ 20.12.23 Superbly lavish and intoxicatingly refined, if shy of epoch-making.	4.1	3.1	2935	-	245
Cullinan Black Badge ★★★★☆ 19.2.20 Far more likeable to drive than look at, for those who have a use for it.	4.9	4.2	2739	23.6	-
SEAT					
Ibiza 1.0 TSI SE Technology ★★★★½ 19.7.17 Grown-up supermini shows its rivals how it's done – in most respects.	10.0	10.0	1047	55.6	-
Leon eHybrid FR ★★★½☆ 2.12.20 Competent and efficient but verges on being forgettable to drive.	7.2	6.2	1558	46.3	26
Arona 1.0 TSI SE Technology ★★★★☆ 15.11.17 Polished, mature all-rounder has since lost its class-best crown.	10.5	10.7	1149	40.9	-

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ateca 1.5 Eco TSI FR Black Edition DSG ★★★☆☆ 25.10.23 Once-appealing Nissan Qashqai rival now shows some signs of neglect.	8.9	8.0	1396	44.4	-
SKODA					
Fabia 1.0 TSI 95PS SE Comfort ★★★★½ 9.2.22 Comfy, spacious and good value, this supermini is Skoda at its best.	9.9	9.7	1117	58.7	-
Scala SE 1.5 TSI 150PS DSG ★★★½☆ 31.7.19 Different from the bigger Octavia but perhaps not by enough.	7.9	7.3	1200	52.9	-
Octavia 2.0 TDI 150PS SE L First Edition Estate DSG ★★★★☆ 2.9.20 Leads the charge to take Skoda upmarket and mostly succeeds.	8.4	8.7	1510	73.0	-
Octavia Estate vRS ★★★★☆ 29.1.25 A fine estate made more engaging rather than a great hot hatch made a bit bigger.	5.9	4.8	–	37.6	-
Superb SE L 2.0 TDI 150PS Estate ★★★★★ 17.7.24 The large, functional estate car modernised in all the right ways.	8.4	8.2	1673	68.7	-
Karoq 2.0 TDI 150PS Scout ★★★½☆ 30.1.19 Practical, comfortable Skoda is short on charm and dynamic polish.	8.9	9.6	1629	47.1	-
Elroq 85 Edition ★★★★½ 19.3.25 Comfortable, efficient, practical and intuitive; a well-rounded, class-topping EV.	6.1	5.0	2085	3.5	246
Enyaq iV 80 Lounge ★★★★☆ 18.8.21 Practical, rangy, well priced. Hits a sweet spot in the EV market.	8.3	7.8	2098	-	262
SMART					
#1 Premium ★★★½☆ 8.11.23 Drivability frustrations mar an otherwise agreeable experience.	5.6	4.6	1861	-	229
#3 Premium ★★★½☆ 15.5.24 Makings of an interesting alternative EV but let down by the finer details.	5.7	4.9	1832	-	205
SUBARU					
Crosstrek 2.0i e-Boxer Touring ★★★½☆ 28.2.24 Improved manners for junior off-roader are welcome, if not transformative.	10.4	10.4	1620	45.3	-
Outback 2.5i Lineartronic Touring ★★★½☆ 27.9.23 A pretty good answer to a question that only a few people asked.	9.3	8.7	1690	42.8	-
Solterra AWD Touring ★★★☆☆ 15.3.23 A hint of Subaru-typical capability doesn't take this EV quite far enough.	6.7	6.2	2051	-	169
SUZUKI					
Across 2.5 PHEV E-Four CVT ★★★★½ 7.4.21 Excellent hybrid powertrain makes it one of the best PHEVs around.	6.4	5.8	1966	44.4	48

TESLA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Model 3 Standard Range Plus	★★★★☆	4.9.19	Wrinkles aside, it offers great electric performance and usability at this price.	5.8	4.7	1633	-	156
Model 3 Long Range	★★★★☆	14.2.24	Packs a real punch. Both updated Model 3s are fine propositions.	4.4	3.4	1846	-	277
Model Y Long Range AWD	★★★★☆	23.3.22	A far better electric car than a premium SUV.	4.7	3.6	1978	-	234
Model S P90D	★★★★⯪	20.4.16	Great EV, intriguing driver's car. Not quite the perfect luxury GT.	3.5	3.0	2220	-	214
Model S Plaid	★★★⯪☆	2.8.23	Astonishing pace but not a fully rounded performance saloon.	2.4	1.7	2220	-	301
Model X 90D	★★★★☆	15.2.17	High-rise EV strains under SUV brief but still feels like a history maker.	5.2	4.2	2508	-	147

TOYOTA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Aygo X Limited Edition	★★★⯪☆	11.5.22	A mostly very grown-up small car but also an expensive one.	15.6	16.5	974	58.7	-
Yaris 1.5 Hybrid Design	★★★★☆	23.9.20	Grows not only in stature but also in ability and subjective appeal.	9.2	8.8	1140	65.0	-
GR Yaris Circuit Pack	★★★★★	3.3.21	Toyota, on a roll with driver's cars, provides yet another winner.	5.2	5.0	1283	39.2	-
Corolla 2.0 Hybrid Design Touring Sports	★★★★☆	5.6.19	A big step up for Toyota in a vital sector and a better hybrid to boot.	8.5	7.7	1537	52.6	-
Prius Plug-in Design	★★★★☆	23.4.25	Better late than never for best Prius to date.	6.6	5.6	1542	56.1	46
bZ4X AWD Vision	★★★⯪☆	18.1.23	A decent effort all round but not exceptional in any way.	6.4	5.9	2023	-	208
Mirai Design Premium	★★★★☆	16.6.21	Impressive hydrogen fuel cell car has made strides but remains hamstrung overall.	8.7	8.3	1937	-	-
GR Supra Pro	★★★★☆	14.8.19	Fast, usable and has plenty going for it but leaves us wanting more.	4.4	3.6	1495	39.0	-
Hilux 2.8 D-4D GR Sport	★★★⯪☆	1.3.23	Gazoo-branded Ford Ranger Raptor rival is formidable but lacks fun factor.	10.0	9.5	2241	32.5	-

VAUXHALL

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Corsa 1.2 Turbo 100PS Ultimate Nav Auto	★★★⯪☆	22.1.20	Supermini is improved in many ways but lacks the appeal to match its price.	11.2	11.5	1171	51.8	-
Astra 1.2 Turbo 130PS GS Line	★★★⯪☆	5.10.22	Family hatchback's gentle push upmarket is only a qualified success.	9.9	9.2	1304	55.3	-
Crossland X 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite	★★★☆☆	7.6.17	Typically practical and well priced, but Vauxhall can do better.	9.8	10.3	1278	54.2	-
Mokka 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite Nav Premium Auto	★★★⯪☆	12.5.21	The driving experience sells a brave design effort just a little short.	9.3	9.1	1238	48.6	-
Grandland X Hybrid4 Ultimate Nav	★★★☆☆	22.4.20	Inspires big expectations and delivers few, but it's an interesting fleet option.	-	-	1800	-	-
Combo Life 1.5 Turbo D 100PS Energy	★★★⯪☆	27.12.18	Usable, spacious and practical, if not very pretty to look at.	14.7	16.2	1552	60.1	-

VOLKSWAGEN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Polo 1.0 TSI 95PS SE	★★★★⯪	31.1.18	Brings 'big car' space, class, kit and finish to this class like never before.	10.7	11.2	1145	57.1	-
Polo 2.0 TSI GTI+	★★★★☆	1.8.18	A usable, quick and vastly competent effort but not the most thrilling.	6.7	5.9	1342	46.8	-
Golf 1.5 eTSI 150PS Style DSG	★★★★⯪	22.7.20	Additional strengths and familiar ones carry it back to the class lead.	8.3	7.8	1330	60.0	-
Golf 1.5 TSI eHybrid Style	★★★★⯪	23.10.24	New plug-in Golf takes the PHEV hatchback's status to greater heights.	7.2	6.1	1619	46.5	-
Golf GTI	★★★⯪☆	25.9.24	'Mk8.5' version of hot hatchback is slick and effective but not a big enough step forward.	5.3	4.4	–	47.2	-
Golf R	★★★★☆	14.4.21	Most entertaining distillation of the Golf R formula yet – for a price.	4.4	3.7	1520	43.9	-
ID 3 Pro Performance Life	★★★★☆	31.3.21	Bland but with the substance to further the zero-emissions push.	7.0	6.5	1757	-	145
Arteon 2.0 BiTDI 240PS 4Motion R-Line	★★★⯪☆	27.9.17	Considered approach produces an executive flagship short on sparkle.	6.5	6.2	1866	55.6	-
Arteon eHybrid Elegance Shooting Brake	★★★⯪☆	9.6.21	Striking PHEV appears radical but upholds Volkswagen's traditions at heart.	7.1	6.0	1783	52.5	-
ID 7 Pro Match	★★★★⯪	13.3.24	Volkswagen finds some electric form in an unexpected format.	6.1	5.1	2162	-	239
T-Roc 2.0 TSI 190PS 4Motion SEL DSG	★★★★⯪	24.1.18	Shows performance verve, dynamic completeness and stylish swagger.	6.7	6.5	1534	37.5	-
T-Roc 1.5 TSI Evo R-Line Cabriolet DSG	★★⯪☆☆	10.6.20	It brings little worth having to the compact cabriolet niche.	-	-	1540	-	-
Tiguan 1.5 eTSI 150PS R-Line	★★★⯪☆	22.5.24	Functional and mature, but this isn't the engine or trim we would go for.	9.4	9.2	1606	44.9	-
ID 4 GTX Max	★★★⯪☆	27.10.21	GTX adds flavour to ID 4 but doesn't reimagine 'GTI' for the EV age.	6.2	5.6	2220	-	200
Touareg 3.0 TDI 4Motion R-Line Tech	★★★⯪☆	8.8.18	An inoffensive if forgettable bid at a luxury market breakthrough.	7.2	6.6	2292	41.6	-
Touareg 3.0 TSI eHybrid 4Motion Elegance	★★★⯪☆	5.6.24	It's versatile and likeably unpretentious but won't be a default company car choice.	6.2	5.7	2446	34.1	26
Touran 2.0 TDI 150PS SE Family DSG	★★★★☆	3.2.16	A spacious, refined and classy all-rounder – albeit a slightly bland one.	9.9	9.7	1666	-	-
Multivan 1.4 eHybrid Style	★★★★☆	8.3.23	Latest Volkswagen 'bus combines the best bits of both car and van.	8.4	7.1	2243	37.9	14
ID Buzz 77kWh Style Pro	★★★★☆	8.2.23	It costs plenty but offers versatility and luxury accomplishments.	9.5	9.1	2498	-	185
Grand California 600	★★★⯪☆	2.1.20	Grandest California is classy but not half as clever as its smaller namesake.	15.8	16.7	3095	28.5	-
Transporter Sportline Black Edition Kombi SWB	★★★☆☆	30.3.22	Not compromised but hardly enhanced by its sporting agenda.	9.1	9.0	2108	39.1	-
Passat eHybrid 204PS Elegance	★★★★☆	13.11.24	Rounded and with good PHEV credentials, but less compelling than its sister car.	7.2	6.4	1836	44.5	73

VOLVO

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
EX30 Single Motor Extended Range Plus	★★★☆☆	1.5.24	Not enough key strengths – and not enough Volvo pragmatism.	5.7	5.1	1779	-	179
C40 Recharge Twin Ultimate	★★★⯪☆	13.4.22	A transitional model for Volvo that doesn't go quite far enough.	4.4	3.6	2172	-	194
XC40 D4 AWD First Edition	★★★★⯪	7.2.18	Wieldy, classy and simple. As good as its bigger brothers, if not better.	8.5	8.5	1735	43.8	-
XC60 D4 AWD R-Design	★★★⯪☆	5.7.17	The right product at the right time but lacking the right dynamic finish.	8.9	8.9	1836	48.9	-
XC90 D5 AWD Momentum	★★★★☆	17.6.15	A very impressive all-rounder with its own distinctive appeal.	8.3	8.3	2076	-	-
V60 D4 Momentum Pro Auto	★★★★☆	27.6.18	Fine-looking, capable and practical estate with only a few demerits.	8.9	8.3	1669	43.1	-
V60 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design	★★★★⯪	21.9.22	Strong hybrid system gives ageing Volvo a lot of fresh appeal.	4.9	4.3	2036	38.0	51
V90 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design	★★★★⯪	11.11.20	Hardly revolutionary but exceptionally appealing nonetheless.	5.6	4.9	2109	41.9	-

XPENG

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
G6 RWD Standard Range	★★★⯪☆	26.2.25	Chinese electric SUV lacks inspiration but has plenty of rational appeal.	6.8	6.2	2067	3.3	208

WHAT'S COMING WHEN

Omoda 3 Early 2026
Chinese brand offers petrol, PHEV or EV power in sci-fi-inspired £30k crossover.

Hyundai Ioniq 9 November
Seven-seat electric SUV packs up to 378bhp, 385-mile range. Priced from around £90,000.

Smart #5 October
Peugeot e-5008-rivalling SUV is underpinned by an 800V electrical architecture.

SCAN THE CODE FOR THE FULL LIST

Why I love...
HONDA CIVIC TYPE Rs

BY WILL RIMELL

FN-generation Civics looked like aliens in mid-2000s traffic

I was quite a lucky child growing up. We lived at the end of a cul-de-sac, on which were four other houses with driveways. I could see each one through my bedroom window, meaning I had five cars to choose from in the fantasy world where I owned all of them – and had a driving licence aged 10.

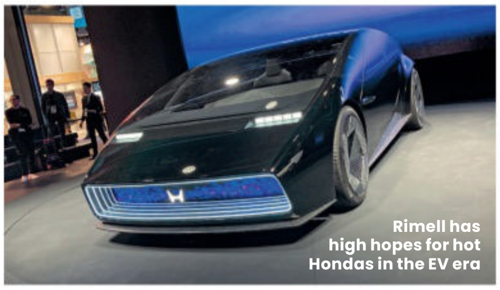
My favourites were always what our next-door neighbour used to bring home (sorry, Dad). He worked in a Honda dealership, and I remember my first encounter with his FN1 Civic. Despite the best efforts of its bland grey paintwork to dull the 'wow' factor of its futuristic, spaceship-inspired silhouette, it was utterly captivating – especially so in the context of what its Ford, Vauxhall and Volkswagen rivals looked like.

I loved the thing, and an obsession was sparked. Posters went up, passenger rides were requested and the rest of my time was spent watching endless videos of Hondas on this up-and-coming website called YouTube, which introduced me to the spicier Type R versions.

Fast forward to my mid-twenties and I finally had the money to scratch the itch, and with a sensible Volvo V40 diesel coming to the end of its lease, I decided I would buy a Civic Type R. More specifically, an FN2. I wanted the UFO.

And even after everything I had read, everything I had watched and everything I had dreamed, first impressions didn't disappoint. From the big, enticing starter button to the split dashboard and those wonderfully comfy red bucket seats, this was a car just made to make you feel special and engaged.

I just wanted to drive it, and drive it hard. But this, sadly, brought out its flaws – flaws that you couldn't see on a poster. It was sprung too hard, the gearbox was a bit crashy and the metal shifter top would be either too cold or boiling to touch, depending on the weather. But it was the dearth of low-end torque from its 2.0-litre four-pot that was the killer for me – and the main reason I sold it about three years later for the BMW Z4 that I still own.



Rimell has high hopes for hot Hondas in the EV era

> **"It was just made to make you feel special and engaged"**

But my love for hot Civics never diminished. A highlight of lockdown for me was watching Chris Harris blitz an FK8 around Japan's Ebisu Circuit against a Lexus LC 500. For me, that was peak Type R: the brash rear wing, the flared nose, the big red calipers and 316bhp. God I wanted one, but its lofty price tag was always out of reach.

When that was replaced by the comparatively subtle FL2, it was a sad day. No longer was this a hot hatch styled for a space on a teenager's wall; now it was a serious sports car aimed at serious drivers who could actually afford it.

I wasn't sold. That was until I drove one. It was everything I had wanted the FN2 to be: fast, loud, engaging, fun. No, it wasn't as brash as the car it had replaced, but it was a lot more aggressive in the metal than pictures implied. That rear wing is comically huge when you're standing next to it.

As Honda moves away from combustion cars and towards electric ones, there are questions over the future of the Type R, but I'm hopeful that there's room in the line-up for a hot version of the wedgy, Giugiaro-esque 0 Series Saloon. It would be quieter than its forebears, sure – not to mention bigger and heavier – but because Honda knows anything bearing the red 'R' badge must do it justice, you just know it would be brilliant.

What we did this week

TARTAN NOIR

I took a Volvo V90 to Scotland and found out what it was like when you have a twisting B-road all to yourself. Where did everybody go? Well, with the V90 being specified in an anonymous black with tinted windows and unassuming alloys, I guess I wasn't the only one who thought it looked like a police car.

JONATHAN BRYCE

IT'S NO LEYLAND LEOPARD

One more log from my recent trip to Shanghai: if you're struggling to keep track of every car maker's alphanumeric naming strategy, spare a thought for Chinese coach fanatics. Here's a snapshot of Zhengzhou-based Yutong's line-up: we've got the ZK68Q6H5Y, the ZK612GHQ5Y and, of course, the six-wheeled ZK6137H15QY1. The thought of a triple test is making me anxious. Strong passwords, though.

FELIX PAGE

PARK AND RECREATION

Yes, at the end of my off-road caravanning adventure (p44), I parked said caravan in this space at Bentley's HQ in one manoeuvre. No, I didn't hit any other Bentleys. Yes, I am unfeasibly proud of myself. And yes, I would like a medal, please and thank you.

MATT PRIOR

4 PINTS
THE NIGHT
BEFORE

One in five drink drive prosecutions happen the morning after[A], many unaware they still have alcohol left in their system from the night before. AlcoSense quickly and accurately tells you your blood alcohol level, so you don't become one of them.

The Telegraph

"a fresh level of accuracy in consumer breath testing"[B]

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